

THE ARGOSY

AUGUST 1901

LATTER RAIN

NO shadow trails along the hill
From field to darkening field, to fall
Soft-glooming down the blinding wall,
With sudden tide of ease to fill
The noontide garden faint and still.

So Time looks down with iron face :
No motion of delight may cross
The passion of an ancient loss,
That dried the dew of morning grace
And strewed the blossom in its place.

Night comes to slake the steady fire :
But ere the night, a twilight hour
Breathes of the rain on leaf and flower.
Here, and in lands of old desire,
Low on the verge the clouds conspire.

JOHN HALSHAM.

MALICIOUS FORTUNE¹

BY STELLA M. DÜRING, AUTHOR OF "BETWEEN THE DEVIL
AND THE DEEP SEA," ETC. ETC.

CHAPTER XX

THE day passed on, and Charles Colquhoun did not die. The wound, as Carstairs had surmised, was a flesh wound only; the bullet, deflected by a button on his shooting jacket, had ploughed its way across his chest and passed harmlessly out through the upper part of his arm, just missing the artery in its course. He struggled rapidly into convalescence by the aid of his splendid constitution and Edith's devoted nursing, and words would never describe the relief with which Carstairs watched him. Carstairs would have left the house on the day of the accident, feeling that where sickness is visitors are better away; but Beresford made his staying the full term of his visit almost a personal matter, and he was by no means sorry to yield the point.

It was true that towards the goal he had set himself, the winning of Helen's forgiveness, he made, as far as he could see, no progress whatever. Handicapped by his anomalous position he could not plead as he wished to plead; even the arguments he felt might fairly be advanced in his excuse were denied him, and she met his cautious experiments in the direction of anything beyond the most distant acquaintanceship with a steady impenetrable coldness that he dare not even try to break down. Yet to be under the same roof with her was something. She saw him frankly liked by other men, his advice sought, his opinion deferred to, his standard of morality and behaviour accepted as final. It must, he argued, have its effect upon her conception of his character, and it was hard, after all, that a man should be judged by the one disgraceful act of his life.

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Surely it is not the one sin he has committed, but the many sins he has not, that stamp him for what he is. And Helen, had he only known it, watched it all, mutely dismayed at the deceitfulness of appearances. "If they knew him as I know him!" was the cry of her smarting soul.

And yet! And yet! Lately she had begun to ask herself—Did she know him after all? Was a man necessarily despicable because, under the pressure of sharp temptation, he had been guilty of one despicable action? Was she not bound, in her honest endeavour to form a just estimate, to take into consideration what could be said for as well as against him? and is it not rather the little daily meannesses, the low view of life and conduct, the aims all selfish, the ends all ignoble, that teach us a man is beneath our respect? As far as she herself was concerned, did he not hold towards her a position of which he was above taking the very smallest advantage? Perhaps! Perhaps! said her inner consciousness. It was only perhaps. Besides, there was always Edith Colquhoun! And in the matter of Edith Colquhoun, had not his behaviour been irreproachable, his attitude beyond all praise? But the very idea of him in connection with Edith Colquhoun was sufficient to close Helen's mind to any consideration of him at all, to throw her back on the almost frantic determination that at any risk of exposure, at any cost to herself, he should be set free from the shackles he had, all unknowing, welded so firmly on his life, though her own were ruined to accomplish it.

It was nearly ten days after Charles Colquhoun's accident, and his progress towards recovery had been rapid. To-night, for the first time, he was one of the group in the drawing-room; and Dickie Tiark, convinced that here was a legitimate field, an unrivalled opportunity for the display of his powers of entertainment, had rushed up from town to welcome him downstairs again, bent, should opportunity occur, on fittingly celebrating the auspicious occasion. Anita welcomed both him and his efforts cordially. In the light of recent happenings her hopes of seeing Helen comfortably provided for as Dickie's wife had certainly languished a little, but they were by no means dead. Therefore did Anita cheerfully sacrifice her own inclination on

the altar of Helen's worldly advantage, and second with her whole heart Dickie's deep-laid schemes for the "amusement" of the assembled company.

"I've got a charade," he told her nervously. His efforts on other people's behalf never met with quite the support to which they were entitled, a fact of which he was wonderingly aware. "I saw it up in the North, at a big hydro. It's capital—it is really. It would be sure to make them laugh; don't you think so?"

"Of course it would," in cordial agreement, "and really it is time we laughed at something. You leave it to me, Mr. Tiark; I'll see that you get an opportunity before the evening is over. And you have nothing to do but draw the curtains across the alcove leading into the small drawing-room and it's a theatre all ready made, isn't it?"

"May I? Will you?" almost pathetically grateful. Anita's heart was warm if it was shallow, and his manner touched her. She patted his arm.

"My dear boy, don't be so dreadfully obliged to me! Have you forgotten how much you have done for us?—how much you are always doing for everybody——"

Dickie blinked and swallowed. Appreciation was sweet, perhaps because he got so little of it. The footman threw the door open at the lower end of the room.

"Mr. Braithwaite," he announced.

He was a big red-faced man, whose nervous, half-deprecating manner was in odd contrast to his bluff appearance. He knew every one in the room slightly, Beresford well. His business was with Beresford. He was barely through his greetings before he said so. Beresford looked round uncertainly. He could only have come about one thing, and as to what that one thing was no one had any doubt whatever, as their faces testified.

"Oh, Mr. Braithwaite, don't go away!" It was Anita, and she very clearly voiced the wishes of all of them. "We are all friends, and we know all about it, except just what you have come to tell. Don't go away, please."

Beresford glanced quickly at him. What might he have

come to tell? But nothing could have been farther removed from guilt than the look in his half-bewildered blue eyes. He drew a chair forward and sat down, his glance passing almost anxiously from one to another.

"I don't know that I've come to tell you anything—except that I had nothing to do with it," he said slowly.

"But what made you imagine we thought you had?"

It was Philip. Braithwaite looked up at him, indignation dawning in his eyes.

"Everybody is thinking so. It was the first thing I heard when I got home, and I only got home last night. It's true I was in Meltham that night; I rode over and put my horse up at the 'Crown.' Funny enough, I meant to go and see L'Estrange, but I didn't go. It was likely to be a painful interview, and I set off for a tramp across country to—to think it all out, you know. I walked farther than I knew, and when I got back to Meltham it was too late to see him that night. But I never met a soul—and nobody'll believe me."

There was a moment's tense silence. Colquhoun lay back upon his pillows a shade paler than he had been before. Edith's very lips were white. Was she, perhaps, face to face at last with her brother's murderer? Carstairs stood, his hand gripped on a chairback, straight and still, watching not Braithwaite but Beresford; and Helen lay back in her chair, white and motionless, gazing at Carstairs as though she would read his very soul. Braithwaite went on, and his fading colour left his florid cheeks mottled and his lips blue.

"It's all exactly as I am telling you"—there was something almost distressing in the simplicity of the assurance. "I—I don't know what to say to convince you, but it is. I never went near him. I've never seen him since last January, when—it—happened. If I had had the least idea what people were thinking, I'd have come home long ago. And when my man told me last night what the report was, I would have come straight here then to see if you believed it, if it had been any way possible. As it was, I came as soon as I could. Beresford, do *you* believe it?"

At the direct appeal Philip hesitated a painful moment.

Helen saw Carstairs' every muscle set rigid as stone as he waited. Then Philip offered his hand.

"No, I don't," he said almost shortly. "I'll not deny that I've suspected you—that we have all suspected you—of a quarrel, man, and an accident, nothing worse," warned to be brief by the sudden blaze in Braithwaite's eyes. "Now I tell you, for any satisfaction it may be to you, I'm convinced you've had nothing to do with it. We"—with a searching look round the little circle—"are all convinced. Who had—is more of a mystery than ever."

"Is Mrs. Colquhoun?"

"Oh, yes, indeed, Mr. Braithwaite," her eyes filling, her pretty mouth quivering plaintively; "no one could doubt that you are speaking the truth."

Carstairs drew a long, hard breath; Helen's eyes, with an almost agonised question in them, were still fixed upon his face. He met them a moment and then sat down, almost as though he were glad of the chance. She looked away, her white lips parting. If things had been different, if Philip had not believed, what would he have done then?

Braithwaite passed his hands over his knees once or twice, his bewildered, half helpless look shifting from one to the other. A man without much either of intellect or education; keeping clear of women, to use his own phrase, as the very deuce in a man's life; having his horses, his dogs, and his model farm for interests, and given occasionally to roaming off to the ends of the earth to allay the sudden fits of restlessness by which he was assailed—the position in which he found himself, on his sudden erratic return, was perplexing indeed.

"They are saying it's murder," he said a little huskily.

"That's because the fellow, whoever he is, that saw L'Estrange that night has kept so quiet. If he hadn't been afraid to show up he'd have shown up before now. Don't you think so, Carstairs?"

"He may have other reasons," said Carstairs quietly. "It isn't always because a man is afraid——"

"They would have to be precious strong reasons, to make him imperil his neck after this fashion."

"There may be things he values—more than his neck!"

Beresford laughed shortly. Dickie thought he saw his opportunity.

"I've—I've got a charade," he began diffidently.

"Good Lord!" groaned Carstairs, flinging himself off his chair.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Tiark!"—it was Anita coming gallantly to Dickie's aid. "Do go and get ready. William will draw the curtains for you. We shall all be so pleased."

"But—I never knew such a *mal à propos* idiot in my life!" It was Beresford, in a wrathful whisper. "Who does he think wants to act charades now?"

"You needn't act; he can do it all himself, he and William; he says so!"

"That's one blessing, anyhow!" with emphasis.

"Oh, Philip, do be reasonable. Remember Helen's chances with him!"

"I suppose you mean his chances with Helen! My dear, he hasn't any!" laughing curtly as the truth of his words came home to him.

"I don't! I mean Helen's chances. Think of the settlement it would be for her——"

"And for heaven's sake laugh at his charade? You always had a keen eye for the main chance, Nan, but I tell you it's no use—however much we laugh. Here, Braithwaite, we can talk till that fool of a curtain goes up, anyhow. What are you going to do now?"

"I don't know. Go home again, I suppose." At which juncture the curtain went up and disclosed—a common kitchen clothes-horse, with Dickie bowing and smiling before it.

"An island in the Grecian archipelago!" he announced, and the curtain fell again.

"Well?" said Dickie, rubbing his hands delightedly as he glanced round his audience, "what is it?"

"I'm—blest if I know," said Philip under his breath.

"A clothes-horse made of deal! A deal horse! Amending the pronunciation, a deal 'oss. Now do you see?"

"I'm blest if I do," said Philip again.

But Anita did. "A deal 'oss! Delos! O Mr. Tiark!" with a faint giggle.

No one else laughed; every one looked vaguely disgusted. Nothing daunted, Dickie drew up his curtain again. There stood the same kitchen clothes-horse and nothing else—save Dickie.

"Another island in the Grecian archipelago!" he announced with unabated cheerfulness, and the curtain fell again.

"Well?" said Dickie with broader smiles and more hand-washing than ever.

"But—it's the same thing!"

"Exactly so!"

Helen leaned forward.

"The same horse! Same 'oss. Samos! Oh!"

A little ripple ran round the circle, Dickie's longed-for laugh peeped at him out of eyes more than half antagonistic. He hurried joyfully away. The curtain rose again, and behind it, behold! the same clothes-horse, William, grinning shame-facedly, a blue curtain draped about his manly form, a twisted cashmere wrap encircling his head, and Dickie, enveloped in a red tablecloth, with Carstairs' red and black tennis handkerchief adorning his smiling brows.

"We're supposed to be Greek merchants," he announced amiably.

Then took place much chaffering, clinking of coin, and effusive handshaking. William shut up the clothes-horse and carried it solemnly out. "That's one blessing, anyway," growled Braithwaite, and Dickie, moist and merry, came into the room divesting himself of his unwonted adornments as he did so.

"Well, now, what is it?" he demanded.

"Oh, you'll be obliged to tell us this one, Mr. Tiark," said Anita with a resigned sigh.

"I suppose I shall. I always do have to tell this one. What did we do now? I sold it, he bought it, in other words *bought* it, didn't he? Now what is it? A-byd-os! See?"

Then the laugh came, short but hearty; even Edith looked faintly amused for the moment. Dickie was rewarded; he had

made them laugh in spite of everything. Beresford was still laughing when William, a hint of his recent draperies still clinging distressfully about his disordered livery and ruffled hair, came up to his master.

"If you please, sir," in a confidential undertone, "there's two men in the 'all, and they want to see Mr. Braithwaite."

The laugh died suddenly; no one could have quite told why. Philip stood up.

"Shan't I do as well? Why do they want Mr. Braithwaite?"

"I'm afraid not, sir. They said Mr. Braithwaite partick'lar."

"Then why didn't you tell Mr. Braithwaite?"

William glanced helplessly round, and it struck Philip that he looked more than a little scared.

"I—thought you ought to know, sir."

Philip pushed his chair aside and strode down the long room in William's wake, Braithwaite following closely. Carstairs leant over the back of Edith Colquhoun's chair.

"Get Colquhoun upstairs," he said almost shortly, and then he, too, walked out into the hall. Helen glided after him, drawn by a vague fear she did not herself understand.

Two respectable looking men were in the hall. Philip had his hand on Braithwaite's arm; Carstairs was leaning against the curving banister, looking eagerly interested and no more.

"Very sorry, sir," said the elder of the two men, "but we are only obeying orders. It'll be all right, sir; don't you be over-anxious. Only I'm afraid we must ask the gentleman to go with us now. It's orders from headquarters, sir."

"Oh, I'll go right enough," said Braithwaite with an effort. "I—I suppose I'd better. It's a mistake, of course. I—I suppose I shall be able to—to convince them of that?" with an almost pathetic endeavour to sound more confident than he felt.

"I'll go with you, my dear fellow," said Philip rapidly. "They won't refuse bail, I'm sure, and I'm good for any amount. Cheer up, man; it's nothing but a temporary inconvenience. I know all the Trentborough bench——"

"Beg pardon, sir, but Trentborough's no good," said the

elder man stolidly ; "our orders is to take the gentleman to Meltham straight. If so be as you would come down after him it might be arranged——"

"Might! It must! Why," as the man looked more than doubtful, "what's the charge?"

"Murder, sir."

Helen put her hands against the sides of the doorway, for she swayed as she stood. And Keith Carstairs was still the quiet interested spectator, nothing about him suggested that the matter touched him personally. Was it possible? would he indeed stand by and raise no hand, say no word to prevent an innocent man's suffering in his stead? Oh, base, cruel, cowardly! Again the scorching word that holds the fullest measure of scorn and contempt an English tongue can express sprang to her lips, blazed in her eyes—her eyes that he would not, could not meet. She put one hand to her throat to strangle there the words of denunciation, almost loathing, that choked her. For of what use were they? Nothing; no one could alter facts, could make him different from what he was, the poltroon who sheltered himself behind an error, who stood deliberately silent while another man bore his punishment. For the elder constable was helping Braithwaite, with incongruous politeness, to put on his coat. As Philip would have reached his, Braithwaite stayed him.

"It's no use, old man; don't bother. I've got to go down to Meltham anyway, and I'd rather go alone."

"Will you have me?"—it was Dickie, white and stammering a little—"I should be s-s-some sort of company, and I could come back and tell them how things w-w-went, you know."

Braithwaite hesitated. He knew Tiark less than any of them; but there was a simple kindliness about him of which he felt the comfort, and when one is suddenly tried by evil circumstances, under which it is by no means certain our behaviour will be all we would have it, it is as well to have a companion of whose opinion we do not stand too much in awe.

"If—you don't mind——" he began.

"Oh, I'd like it," said Dickie, running off for his coat.

Braithwaite turned on the step and gripped Philip's hand.

"Good-bye; I won't see the others. You'll explain——"

"I'm coming down to-morrow," Philip told him huskily.
"I'll move heaven and earth, but I'll help you, old man."

"I'm sure of it! What a mercy it is I saw you beforehand."

He was gone, with Dickie in the background, content as ever, good fellow, if only he could feel he was of some use there; and, blackest of treacheries, Carstairs had let him go! There he stood, his handsome face a little white, a little set, quietly accepting a position which to any decent-minded man must have been intolerable. For a moment Helen gazed at him in amazement and woe. It was true, it was true—and why, considering all she knew of him, she should find it so difficult to believe, was beyond her. Yet Braithwaite had undoubtedly left the house in custody, and Carstairs had as undoubtedly let him so leave it. Her eyes, fixed on him in amazement, horror, and grief, drew his slowly but surely. For one moment he met them, his look inscrutable, his face impassive as stone. Then, with a low cry of distress, Helen sprang past him and fled up the curving stairway. But the shelter of her own room was denied her; housemaids were there, whispering and laughing, clinking water-jugs and mending fires, all unconscious of the tragedy just played out below. She stepped aside into the tiny turret room corresponding to Anita's, and turned the key with a quick hand.

A large window, overlooking the sea, and furnished with a deep window-seat and plentiful cushions, was on the landing outside. There Carstairs threw himself, hidden by the curtains before him, to wait.

He waited in dogged silence. Edith Colquhoun, bent on keeping from her husband any knowledge that could agitate him, had only the vaguest idea of what had taken place. Anita, reveling in an entirely new set of sensations, plied Philip with endless questions down below. One of them gave him an odd start.

"Philip, where is Helen—and Major Carstairs?"

"I don't know," almost sharply. "Let them alone."

"Well," with the little inconsequent laugh Philip found so exquisitely irritating, "I am letting them alone. I only want to know where they are."

Yet something in Philip's tone prevented her taking any steps to find them.

Meanwhile, in grim silence, Carstairs waited—waited till certain low distressful sounds in the room subsided, waited through a silence even harder to bear, waited till a subdued silken rustle and a softly turning key brought him with a start to his feet. As Helen stepped on to the landing he caught her wrists, and held her firmly before him. For a moment she fought desperately to release herself; then, realising her own impotence, was as suddenly still. She faced him, rigid and chill—a word, the word he had heard once before, blazing in her eyes, burning on her tongue. The grasp of his hands on her arms tightened almost painfully.

"No," he said hoarsely, "not again! I can't stand it a second time! Besides, this time it isn't true. I'm glad you care enough to cry as you've been crying in there, because you think I'm a blackguard. But I'm not as big a blackguard as you are thinking; I wasn't last time, if you remember. There's one thing against me—yes, I know; but it doesn't follow that because I did that one thing I can do everything. I'm not a cad all round."

He broke off, breathing hard and quick. Helen's wrists lay passive in his firm hold, in her wide eyes a tiny shivering hope was lurking. He went on.

"I didn't speak downstairs? No. There would have been a fearful fuss," with an unaffected shudder, "and I've no taste for melodrama. Besides, where was the use? He had to go to Meltham anyhow; and he's so convinced he'll be able to prove his innocence, he won't suffer much. I'm going after him."

He paused again to recover his hold upon himself, he had that to say that was making his heart beat hard and heavy. Helen was absolutely still, but he read her question in her face.

"When? To-morrow morning early; there's no sense in going to-night; I couldn't do anything. But—this is good-bye, Helen. And before I say it to you I've something else to say. I love you, I love you, I love you," his voice thrilling lower

deeper, more triumphant with each repetition, "with all my heart and soul, and I *will* tell you so. I thought I loved Edith Colquhoun. It was the purest idealism, I didn't know what love meant. I've lived on it ten years—I don't know how I've done it—but I have. This isn't idealism; this is reality. I believe I've loved you from the first, only I didn't know it, till I saw how I had made you hate me. But I know it now, and it's worth everything—even that. I'd give all I ever did or ever shall possess to kiss you this moment, and not feel you shrink as I know you would shrink! Oh, you need not be afraid," with a curt laugh, "I'm not going to do it! I claim nothing, there's perhaps nothing to claim, and you shall have your liberty, never fear, and that soon. And now I'm going; and if I can help it"—almost flinging her hands from him—"I will never see your face again."

CHAPTER XXI

HELEN awoke the next morning with a sense, vague, illogical, unreasonable, but none the less real, that her life was transfigured. It was useless to ask herself why—to remind herself that Carstairs, though not quite the villain she had thought him yesterday, was still the man he had been before, the man whose crime against her, she had assured herself so bitterly and so often, was absolutely unforgivable—the fact remained. He loved her—she hid a flushing, quivering face in her pillows as the truth came home to her afresh—her and not Edith Colquhoun; those fierce, curt sentences, amazingly unloverlike, had at least convinced her of that, and life, even hers, maimed and broken as she had believed it, blossomed like a rose about her.

Oh, if only, if only—the smarting tears rising again—things had been different—as they might have been! If his fault had been different, one that she could, one that she dare forgive! If she had been without that sickening element of doubt as to her relationship towards him, and could have persuaded herself that it was her duty to forgive him! Other wives forgave

their husbands—so she had been told—worse things. The wives she knew—would they, could they forgive? She would try to find out; she would test Edith Colquhoun; she, at least, was a good woman.

As luck would have it, Edith came in at that moment, all her pretty, fair hair down her back, her quest the lavender water of which Helen always had a plentiful supply.

"Do you think," Helen asked in desperation, "that if one—one really loves a man, I mean"—with a gasp, what was she saying?—"if one does, one ought to forgive him—if he has done wrong?"

"Oh, of course," easily indifferent; "it is every one's duty to forgive, you know."

"Yes, but—supposing it is something very bad—something one has felt for months that one can't forgive? Take your own case! If Mr. Colquhoun had done something very bad, disgraced himself perhaps—I mean—imagine it, you know——"

Edith's head rose, indignation flushing her cheeks faintly pink, her plaintive Botticellian mouth curving proudly.

"I cannot imagine Charlie's ever disgracing himself. One cannot argue from an utterly impossible supposition."

Helen dropped her forehead on her hand, and her quick in-drawn breath passed sharply between her teeth. That was how other wives felt towards their husbands! She would try Anita. Philip was good, certainly, but he was perhaps not so painfully good as Mr. Colquhoun. And Anita was a comforting contrast to his wife. Anita was alone in the breakfast-room, and received the steady question with a shrewd little gleam in her blue eyes.

"That depends altogether, ducksie, on whether you want to forgive him or not."

"And—what does that depend on?"

"On whether you care for him or not."

"And if—one does?"

"Then forgive him, petsie, by all means, anything—everything—and be happy."

"But, Nan," Helen protested, "that has nothing whatever to do with the right and the wrong of the case."

"And neither have we," said Nan, nodding sagely, which was Nan's philosophy in a nutshell. But it was not Helen's. However, she had no more time for the hopeless endeavour to measure her own conduct by other people's foot-rules. Philip came in, Bradshaw in hand; he was going to Meltham. With a shock Helen realised that she alone was aware of any reason why he shouldn't. She laid a hand that trembled on the open Bradshaw.

"Philip, a moment; I want to speak to you."

"My dear child, I haven't time. I have to catch the 9 45."

"You haven't; you needn't," in a rapid undertone. "You mustn't go at all."

"Not go? Why?"

"There's no need."

"Leave Braithwaite in the lurch?"

"He isn't in the lurch."

Philip glanced suddenly round the room; she had drawn him to the wide window, out of earshot of the others.

"Where's Carstairs?" he asked curtly.

"He has gone to Meltham."

"To Meltham? Why couldn't he say so yesterday?"

Helen raised imploring eyes, dark with excitement and trouble.

"Philip, I can't explain. I can only beg you not to go—till to-morrow."

"You are painfully mysterious."

"I can't help it."

"And what about Braithwaite?"

"Mr. Braithwaite will probably be here before night."

Philip studied her keenly. Did some faint glimmer of the truth dawn on him? He shut up his Bradshaw with a snap.

"I'm not going," he announced curtly. "Nell has had news. I can't explain," silencing Anita's thronging questions, "and neither can she. You will know more—I hope we all shall—before night."

They did. The three, Philip, Helen, and Anita, were dining when there came the sharp ring of an arrival. Helen laid down her serviette, and with a white look at Philip rose and

went into the hall. Braithwaite and Dickie were both there. Braithwaite turned to Philip.

"It's Carstairs," he said abruptly. "He has given himself up."

"Major Carstairs! Did *he* murder Mr. L'Estrange?"

Braithwaite swung round at Anita's horrified inquiry.

"He says he didn't murder him—that L'Estrange threatened him, and he knocked his arm up; that the thing was an accident."

"Do they—believe him?" The question would hardly leave Helen's white lips. Braithwaite stared at her a moment.

"No," he said shortly.

Philip put out a quick hand and took Helen's, feeling vaguely that that warm human grasp, with its promise of comfort and help, was needed.

"But—why ever didn't he say so before?"

Braithwaite turned his bewildered eyes on Anita again.

"Well, you see——" he began slowly, and stopped.

Dickie said nothing. He was watching Helen with all his heart in his eyes, and it was with a look of such sympathy, such heartbroken understanding, that she shrank under it. How she got through the remainder of the meal, what was said, and who said it, Helen never knew. She did not seem to possess the full control of her faculties till she stood alone with Philip once again in the hall.

"Nell, recover yourself," he said quickly. "My poor girl! things will—they *must* go right for him. How long have you known this?"

"Oh, weeks, Philip," clinging suddenly to his arm. "What a blessing it is you know! Edith Colquhoun can save him—if she will. Edith Colquhoun and I! We can explain—what he will not. You will take me to Meltham, to-morrow?"

"Yes," said Philip, patting her hands.

"Don't leave Helen too much alone, and don't worry her with questions," he said to Anita a little later.

Anita nodded cheerfully, feeling herself quite mistress of the situation. But Nell would have none of her; all her cry was for Edith Colquhoun.

It took some little time to tear Mrs. Colquhoun from Charlie's side, to convince her that other duties and interests existed for her apart from her husband. By the time she reached Miss Thorneycroft's room Helen had worked herself up into a state of agitation almost beyond control. She turned with a gasp at Mrs. Colquhoun's entrance.

"Edith, we must save him, you and I! He has gone to his death—for you!"

"Who has?" asked Edith blankly.

"Major Carstairs! It was he who was with your brother that night he was shot. They had quarrelled about you. He said nothing, for your sake. He will be silent even now, for your sake. Oh Edith, you will tell the whole truth—and save him."

But Edith heard her, whitening and shrinking.

"Major Carstairs—was with Harry—that night—and he has said nothing—all these weeks!"

"Edith, it was for you!"

But somehow the plea failed of its effect—failed utterly, failed ominously.

"For me! I don't know what you mean. Besides—Harry was murdered! The doctors say so, the jury said so. Did Major Carstairs——"

"Edith, how can you misjudge him so!—you that he has worshipped all these years?"

A faint pink stain crept over the waxen fairness before her, different indeed from the carmine flood of Helen's blushes.

"How dare you tell me that?" she asked, icily indignant. "How dare he tell you, either! I have known, of course, but I have almost prayed no one else might."

"It has done you no harm," said Helen passionately; "you ought to have been proud of it."

"Ought I?" with amazed and haughty eyes. "We—we see things differently. I have lived in dread of him and his folly. I have avoided him in every way. I never could understand why Charlie was sorry for him, how he could even like him! But all this has nothing to do with Harry," her voice breaking with a sob on the name.

"But it has everything to do with him. They quarrelled about you. Mr. L'Estrange threatened to shoot him, and the pistol went off by accident."

"Threatened to shoot him! I wish he had," with exceeding bitterness.

"Edith!"

"I do. Whose life do you think I valued most? And he was with him—and said nothing! He has known all these weeks and said nothing! An accident, he says! How do we know it was an accident? If it had been an accident he would have told some one about it."

"Edith, how *can* you—when it was for you?"

"For me! What right had he to place me in such a position that it was necessary to be silent—to hush things up, for my sake? But I do not care to discuss Keith Carstairs with you, and I must go back to Charlie. What is it you wanted me to do?"

She would not do it! With a shock Helen realised the impossibility to the narrower mind and less noble nature of what would have been her own simple and straightforward course.

"I wanted you to tell them, in court, why he has been silent all this time. You can explain, you can save him—and only you."

"Tell them, in court, that he has dared to acknowledge he loved me!—that my own brother had to threaten to shoot him? Helen, you don't mean it!"

"But if you will not speak he will be hanged!"

"And how do you know he does not deserve it? We have only his word against every other opinion."

"Is it possible," crushing her fingers against one another, "that you—*you*—can misunderstand him so!"

"Misunderstand him! I have known him as many years as you have months; I think it likely I understand him better than you do. And as for acknowledging—what I have been ashamed of for years—to save him! I couldn't—I would not do it."

"Then I must! He has sacrificed enough to you and your reputation, he shall not fling his life away after the rest! If *you* do not explain his silence, *I* shall!"

"You will! *You* will! Why, what is he to you?"

"He is all the world to me."

She stood erect and said it, triumphant, bold, and beautiful. She had a right to say it after yesterday, though she had not known it herself until this moment. For an instant Edith gazed at her in mute amazement, the next with a swift movement she was at her side: she could forget herself and her own spotlessness sometimes.

"Dear," she whispered, "I am sorry; I didn't know." And the two women the culprit had loved wept softly on one another's shoulders. Helen raised her head first.

"Edith, I mean it. I shall tell the truth."

"Yes, dear," with a sigh, "I suppose you must."

"And you will try and believe—for my sake—that indeed it was an accident?"

"Yes, dear."

She was gone, back to the duties that were obvious and that involved no sacrifices. She was less astonished than Helen had expected at the fact of Keith Carstairs' connection with her brother's death; the iniquity of his silence on the subject was the most prominent factor in the case to her mind, and the fact that he had been silent for her sake went for nothing. And now Helen loved him, the man whose heart had been at her feet for so long that she had grown unconsciously to regard it as in its proper place. Poor Helen! She might love him, Edith reflected, but it was regrettable that she should acknowledge it. When a—preference—like that is hopeless from the first, the fewer people aware of it the better.

Meanwhile Helen in her unendurable restlessness had gone down again to Philip. Philip knew. Oh, the comfort of it! To Philip she could speak with some semblance of candour. He looked up quickly as she came into the library. It was getting late, and he was alone.

"Well?" he asked.

Helen's head rose.

"She sacrifices him deliberately," she said with quiet bitterness.

"Sacrifices him? To what?"

"To her good name."

"But what has Carstairs to do with Mrs. Colquhoun?"

"Nothing."

"My dear girl," said Philip patiently, "if you were not quite so fond of riddles——"

Helen came round and laid her hands on the back of Philip's chair. It was easier to talk where he could not see her.

"Philip, they quarrelled—Mr. L'Estrange and Mr. Carstairs—about Edith Colquhoun. Mr. L'Estrange threatened to shoot him, and the pistol went off by accident. That is the whole truth."

"Dear, dear, dear!" said Philip aghast; "no one ever suspected anything of that sort."

"Of what sort?"

"Well, anything between Edith Colquhoun and Carstairs."

"There never was anything between them."

"Then why did L'Estrange threaten to shoot him?"

"Mr. L'Estrange was mad."

"Well, of course, that's what Carstairs says. But who will believe him?"

"No one—in a brute world like this. That is what he has foreseen. That is why he has been silent, why he will be silent. Philip, they will hang him. Edith will not save him, so I must."

"You! But what can you do?"

"I can tell the whole truth—as he told it to me. It is Edith's reputation against his life. His life is more to me than Edith's reputation."

"But will they let you explain?"

"I will make them. He cannot speak for himself."

"Well, dear, you can try," said Philip not too hopefully.

CHAPTER XXII

"WHAT is it all about, my man?"

Meltham was not excited, Meltham was never excited. Neither was there a crowd, crowds in the ordinary acceptance

of the term being unknown there. But groups of rustics, little knots of two and three, were standing about in the broad sleepy-looking street leading into the market-place, and all their heads were turned one way. A countryman, stolid and smock-frocked, touched his hat at Philip's question.

"Judge and shayriffs be a-comin' in, zur."

Philip's first feeling of entirely alien interest gave place to a strong slow throb of dismay. The matter touched him personally, amazing, inexplicable fact! For the first time in his life he was connected, closely, personally connected, not with the judicial but with the criminal side of the court of justice. In the grim grey stone building behind the town-hall, of whose barred windows and frowning wall a glimpse could be got from where he stood, lay a friend of his, accused of murder. He would face a jury of twelve good men and true in the course of the next few days, a prisoner! In his behalf his own sister-in-law, Helen herself, would say what could be said to dissipate the cloud of suspicion and distrust in which his own conduct, not understandable without her explanation, had enveloped him. It was past belief.

"Judge Thoms, he's a hanging judge, he be."

His rustic friend imparted the information with a slow and unctuous roll of satisfaction. The thought of Judge Thoms' gruesome reputation stirred his sluggish veins not unpleasantly. Philip shivered, conscious of a horrible anxiety to catch a glimpse of the coming dignitary, whose personal idiosyncrasies of character might mean so much to him and his.

"There's a gent in theer," encouraged by Philip's proximity and dimly aware of the almost painful interest in his face as he indicated the "town-gaol" with a broad thumb, "mardered another gent, they saay! He'll hang'n, he will. Sarve'n right."

Philip turned short and left him. Things were horribly wrong somewhere.

They had been in Meltham nearly three weeks and it was now the second half of November. Philip had seen Carstairs once or twice, but, as all his endeavours had been of no avail to secure for him any indulgence or effect any alteration in his

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treatment as a prisoner awaiting trial, he had set his face steadily against Helen's going near him. He had spared her, too, all the grim details of his own visits, the wire grills, the listening warder, the impossibility of even shaking hands with a man who, after all, was only suspected of having broken the law. He came home from his first interview more agitated, more deeply angry than Helen had ever seen him, but he spared her the recital of his experiences.

"I always thought it was a principle in English law to believe a man innocent until he was proved guilty. It's evidently just the other way!" was all he would say.

Carstairs' solicitor saw him constantly, and the keen-faced little gentleman and Helen were by this time fast friends. He sprang up the staircase of the "Rose and Crown" to Philip's private sitting-room, a long, low room overlooking the market-place, where Helen was pacing restlessly up and down in the firelit afternoon greyness, the day Philip awaited the coming of the judge. Behind him was a big Irishman.

"This is Mr. Denisthorpe, your counsel," he told her.

Helen looked quickly at the burly stranger. His face was rugged and good-humoured, but it by no means suggested brilliancy. The girl turned to the solicitor, vaguely disappointed.

"He has said nothing yet, Mr. Courthope?"

"To explain his silence? Not a word. All he will say is that it was an accident and he thought it best to keep quiet about it. It's——" and the little man shook his head dolefully. "But you can save him from himself, if you will, you know. And now tell Mr. Denisthorpe what you have told me."

Helen turned swiftly.

"It was for a woman's sake! Mr. L'Estrange was her brother. They quarrelled about her, and Mr. L'Estrange was shot by accident. Major Carstairs will say nothing—because—because——"

Helen broke off, her breath coming quick and her eyes flashing. Denisthorpe stroked his chin and nodded, more than satisfied.

"It's hopeful, vurry hopeful," he said slowly. "There's

just that element in it that will appeal to your average juryman. The jury are men, Miss Thorneycroft, with heartts, tender heartts, and don't you forget it. Speak to them, touch them, find their heartts, the judge doesn't matther a hang; look at them as you look at me just now, and the day is ours."

At the musical roll of his sonorous voice Helen's courage rose by leaps and bounds.

"You think so?"

"I'm shure of ut!"

She turned to Mr. Courthope.

"You haven't told Major Carstairs what I am going to do?"

"No."

"You mustn't; he would forbid me."

"But," with a smile, "you are not bound to obey him, even if he does."

Helen's breath caught sharply. Was she or wasn't she? That was a question she could not answer just then. Philip looked at her; he had come in as they were talking, and a question stirred uneasily in his mind, too, more often than was pleasant. If things were as Helen had told him they were a little while ago, Helen Thorneycroft could not give evidence in the prisoner's favour because there was no Helen Thorneycroft. However, he strengthened himself in his policy of non-interference—Helen's conscience was Helen's own affair—and waited.

He came in the next day looking worn and worried.

"The grand jury have found a true bill," he said, looking anywhere but at Helen.

There was a moment's blank silence while every one buried a dead hope.

"Well," said Helen, steadily courageous, "we always knew they would, you know."

Some one knocked and came modestly in through the shadows.

"Why, it's Dickie!" said Anita cordially.

Dickie beamed. Never had he admired his own name as he admired it then. He shook hands all round, blinking and swallowing, for Helen's eyes were full of welcome: the friend

who comes to us in trouble is apt to find his indiscretions forgotten and his kindnesses remembered.

"I—I hope you don't mind. I—I couldn't keep away any longer," he said, breathless and apologetic. "I—I wish there was something I could do!"

"You can cheer us all up, Mr. Tiark," Anita assured him; "I mean" (with a shuddering recollection of former experiments in that direction) "your very presence will do that, you know. It's something to see any one in this deadly place."

"Oh," with a gasp, "if only you would call me Dickie again!"

"Of course we will—we all will, won't we, Helen?" and Helen smiled assent, indifferent what they called him.

"It's coming on to-morrow, second on the list," said Philip gloomily.

Dickie nodded.

"Helen is subpœnaed as a witness in his favour," Philip went on.

Dickie's jaw dropped slightly.

"Is she? But they'll cross-examine her, and the counsel on the other side is such an awful brute."

"Oh, she won't mind that! She has any amount of courage. If only she doesn't work herself up into a nervous fever beforehand."

He glanced half apprehensively at her as he spoke. She loved the man whose life hung on a thread—he was sure of it. And he was her husband—at least she had told him she thought he was! Philip sighed resignedly. What it all meant he could not imagine, but it was natural that Helen's eyes should have grown over-big and over-bright, and her face have fined and sharpened during these last long days.

"Should I be able to see him?" asked Dickie.

Philip shook his head.

"You'll see him to-morrow," he added grimly.

A slight shiver passed over Helen's whole frame. It was growing clearer, more real, what she had to face to-morrow. Dickie saw her look, and his heart ached within him. No one, he told himself, understood it quite as he understood it.

"Oh, if only there were something I could do!" he groaned.

The evening wore away somehow. Dickie left early. As he stood, forlorn and unhappy, on the steps of the "Rose and Crown," uncertain with what to occupy the hours between nine o'clock and bed-time, the lighted windows of the other hotel opposite, across the market square, the hotel where the various counsel and others connected with the business of the assizes were staying, caught his eye. His face brightened suddenly. Every one knows what Satan does for the idle. Dickie's slim body seemed to gather itself up, as every line of it followed the eager pointing of his nose towards one particular lighted window. He had thought of something he could do.

The November sunlight fell, pale and misty, across the market-place next day, and Helen, strung to the highest pitch of nervous tension, lay back in a big chair by one of the windows in Philip's sitting-room, and waited. Anita fluttered in and out, excited, helpless, and in everybody's way.

"Isn't there anything I can do, Nell?" she asked at last.

"Yes," said Helen steadily, "you can keep Dickie Tiark away."

"But is there nothing else? Can I sit with you? read to you?"

"Oh, no, please! I only want to be quiet."

Anita shut the door softly and met Dickie on the stairs.

"Come along—it's beginning," she said, laying a tragic hand on his arm.

People were passing in and out of the arched door of the courthouse like bees in a hive. Helen saw Anita and Dickie go in, and breathed more freely.

The room was packed with people, but an official caught sight of Anita's bewildered face in the doorway, beckoned and placed them in an empty corner close to the front.

"We can see everything beautifully here," she remarked shaking her silken skirts and settling herself as if she were in a theatre.

Dickie did not answer, for at that moment a door opened at the back of the room and Carstairs came in followed by two burly constables. Dickie groaned softly at the sight; Carstairs

had had a painfully new interest for him lately. He looked haggard and pale, the month's confinement had told terribly; but his dark eyes, calm and steady, swept over the crowded room. The one glance contented him. After that he looked steadily down, and occasionally found his own fingernails an absorbing study. Once he smiled and the colour glowed faintly under his dark skin; he had caught sight of Philip in the doorway.

The business of the court went on in the terrible, matter-of-fact fashion that is so inexplicable and so awe-inspiring to those who quiver under it. Carstairs pleaded "not guilty" in a voice so composed as to be almost indifferent. Anita laid a hand on Dickie's arm.

"I don't quite like the look of the jury," she said uneasily.

"No, I'm afraid he isn't impressing them favourably," agreed Dickie miserably.

Judge Thoms settled his wig and his papers and composed himself to listen, though he looked asleep. Carstairs also composed himself to listen, and as he listened his head rose and his eyes opened. Could the mean and despicable villain the counsel for the prosecution was describing, who, with the murder of a friend hidden in the depths of his soul, had given himself up to profligate courses and riotous living, who was a disgrace to the regiment he belonged to and a stain upon the flag he served, really be intended for him? There was one touch of comfort in the situation. The learned Q.C. showed a most reassuring ignorance as to the subject upon which he and L'Estrange had quarrelled, but he ingeniously suggested many points upon which they might have done. He sat down at last with a fine sense of accomplishment, leaving the "prisoner at the bar" with a blank realisation that every person in court believed every word that had been said against him; in fact, he was not quite sure he did not believe it himself. He had deliberately to remind himself that he had not shot Harry L'Estrange, either out of rivalry, or to avenge a fancied insult, or because he would not lend him money for further indulgences; he had deliberately to remind himself that he had not plunged headlong into a dissipated career to drown his remorse,

and that he had not waited until discovery was imminent before he rescued the innocent man who was likely to suffer for his crime. He smiled as he remembered the occasional supper at the *Café Monaco*, the occasional visit of an evening to the theatre with which he had endeavoured to brighten his austere and simple days. Then he could attend to what his own counsel was saying.

For now it was Denisthorne's turn, and Denisthorne was putting a different complexion upon matters.

He had drawn a picture, vivid and dramatic, of what had happened in that upper room the summer night that seemed now so long ago; had acknowledged the quarrel, and described with effect the few moments in which Carstairs had sat, in peril of his life, opposite a madman, and a madman armed—but of all that Carstairs heard never a word.

"Ye have hearrd," were the first words that penetrated the mists about Carstairs' brain, "that the man before you is a villain, who could shoot down a defenceless friend like a dog and live a gay and wicked life with the knowledge on his soul. I tell you no, gentlemen. The man before you is a hero, a martyr. What is his only crime, gentlemen? One that you or I or any man worthy the name would unhesitatingly be guilty of—and proud of the chance. What has he done, gentlemen? Sacrificed himself, jeopardised his own neck, suffered a month's imprisonment, faced the hangman—to save a woman!"

Carstairs stiffened all over. Who could have so basely betrayed him? Who but Dickie, who found out everything and betrayed everybody with the best intentions in the world? He shot a lightning look at that listening gentleman that boded ill for him should the desire of Major Carstairs' friends be granted and he be released. But Denisthorne's musical bass was still rolling through the court.

"Upon what does the accusation against him rest, gentlemen? His own confession. Where are the witnesses that should prove him guilty? There are none—not one. He acknowledges that there was a quarrel between himself and his friend, that, in the regrettable struggle for the possession of

the revolver, it went off accidentally, and his friend was shot—killed, gentlemen, on the spot. What should he have done? Given information at once as to what had happened. Instead of which he left the place in silence and has kept silence ever since. Why, gentlemen? For the sake of a woman! However, if he will not clear himself, those who love him better than he loves himself must clear him, even against his own wishes." Carstairs felt a little thrill run to his finger-tips. What did the man mean? Of whom was he talking? "I contend, gentlemen, that the only crime that he has been guilty of is the crime of silence, and that that crime was against himself. I look forward with confidence to the moment when you will recognise him for what he is; not the cold-blooded monster, the murderer of one friend and betrayer of another, as he has been represented, but a willing sacrifice to a mistaken idea, a cheerful sufferer in a cause that touches us all, the cause of chivalry! And now"—with a telling change of tone—"I beg leave to call my witnesses."

The judge leaned forward. He looked interested.

"You can prove what you have said?"

"Up to the hilt, y'r honour."

"As a matter of personal knowledge?"

"From his own acknowledgments to the person I wish to call."

The judge leant back in his chair with a little nod. His look of chill boredom with the whole proceedings had settled over him again. It was here that Philip slipped away from his post by the door and ran across the market-place to fetch Helen.

"Come along, Nell," he said crisply. "Denisthorpe is a capital fellow. They are all ready for you. I'm sure you have nothing to fear after his introduction; it was capital."

"I'm only afraid of the—man on the other side," said Helen, with rather a white look. "If he questions me——"

"He won't," said Philip reassuringly, and with more truth than he knew.

The witnesses for the prosecution were being smartly disposed of, the doctor who described the injury, the sergeant to whom Carstairs had given himself up. Denisthorpe had no

questions to ask, and evidently regarded their testimony as of very little importance. Carstairs was hardly listening: what was the use of proving what no one disputed?—and all his faculties were absorbed in waiting. Who was this that loved him better than he loved himself?—that was determined to rescue him, whether he would or not? Dare he imagine? Was it a hope that set every pulse throbbing? If it were a hope, a hope that stood sure-founded, and not a fancy, a delusion, born of his own desperate longing, then indeed it was sweet to be saved from himself and his own folly—to be snatched, in defiance of his own wishes, from the destruction he had brought upon his own head. The voice of the crier sent a shock through him.

“Helen Thorneycroft.”

The court, the table, with its busily-writing reporters before him, the judge, the listening crowd, blended into one rustling blur before his eyes, and one face, outlined in blinding light, grew out of the indistinctness opposite him—Helen's, pale but composed, her head erect, her whole manner softly appealing—Helen, proclaimed in open court the one who loved him better than he loved himself! His hands gripped the bar before him as she took the oath, her voice low but steady. What did it all mean?

There was a sudden hush, a throb—(Denisthorpe, with an experienced finger on the pulse of the court, detected it)—of genuine sympathy. His eye brightened as he stood up. But before he could speak a rustle of silk stayed him. His adversary, Helen's dreaded opposing counsel, had also risen.

“I object, y'r honour.”

The judge, who had closed his eyes, and to all appearance gone to sleep again, opened them wide, and proved himself astonishingly wakeful.

“To the witness?”

“Yes, y'r honour. May I ask one question first? Your name”—as the judge nodded assent—“is Helen Thorneycroft?”

“Yes,” said Helen clearly.

Counsel for the prosecution looked at her. The judge looked

at her ; all the court looked at her. But Helen was conscious of nothing but one pair of imploring dark eyes that were also looking at her.

"Your name," said the opposing counsel again, slowly, deliberately, with a manifest but as yet veiled intention, "is Helen Thorneycroft?"

Helen drew herself a thought more erect.

"My name is Helen Thorneycroft."

Then did counsel for the prosecution shrug his gowned shoulders, as who would say, "This is an evil world, but I am not responsible!"

"This witness's evidence is inadmissible, y'r honour," he said briskly; "she is the prisoner's wife."

(To be concluded.)

IN THE WIND'S CRADLE

I TOOK my English longbow and arrows, my fishing tackle, my books and my tent up into the hills of North Georgia and dwelt for two golden weeks all alone beside the Saliquoy, a stream which at my chosen point is but a strong spring-fed mill-stream wherein the bass find life very pleasant. My tent I pitched under a wide-spreading oak, with its doorway looking upon a tangled mass of wild-rose vines in full bloom. When this was done I felt quite tired, for I had paddled the canoe all morning, and it was now ten o'clock on a dreamy June day ; so I bethought me of my hammock, an extra fine one sent me by a friend in New Orleans.

It is a story of this hammock that I now wish to tell—a story of the tree-tops and the breeze—a story of a cradle rocked by the wind.

I swung it between two tall young maple-trees close to the stream's edge, and bestowed myself in it face upward, limbs outstretched, chest expanded, a victim to the insidious wiles of Idleness and to the seductions of a blooming and melodious solitude. Upward I could look through windy foliage to a sky whose blue had been clarified and brightened by the passing of a little storm. Flashes of sunlight came and went through the gently swaying tree-tops, like brilliant thoughts through the brain of a poet. Two blue-jays, yodling in an undertone, were busying themselves in one of my maples, and their voices, barely audible, fell upon me, as if distilled from the leaves, in fine fragmentary sprays of tender sound touched with the universal influence of love. Their plumage, dashed with sapphire lights and softer blues shading off into turquoise, shone clearly, even against the sky. They sat upon the slender twigs, while the breeze swung them to and fro, and the thought came to me that their hammock, far up there in the fragrant foliage in the full current of the wind, was the ideal one.

A delicate envy diffused itself throughout my conscious-

ness, and the suggestion was engendered that it might be possible for a man to prove himself the equal of a blue-jay. Instantly I saw the two stiff-looking boughs to which high overhead I would tie my hammock halliards. The inspiration of the moment flashed over the project with a light that never was on sea or land. All the charm of a new and strange poem attended the thought of swinging in the tree-tops, like a wild bird in its nest. It was of my nature to climb, and so, with my hammock done into a small bundle at my back, I mounted one of the tall young maples, and there (where the boughs were bending overhead in a thin rustling canopy, and mingling below in denser tangle) the halliards were made fast to two stout but flexible limbs. As a quite unnecessary precaution I doubled all the ropes; not that I was afraid, but one's conscience is insistent on an occasion of this sort, and there is a precious luxury in the sense of absolute security. How high it appeared as I looked down and saw the tent and the pool! I do not wholly deny a feeling of lightness and instability as I momentarily hesitated to trust myself to the outspread meshes of the hammock; but the mood scarcely touched me before I shook it off. Aloft with the birds I would swing and sing and dream in my hang-nest among the topmost sprays of the maples, a part of nature and an enthusiastic abettor in her savage revolt against the authority of art. Up here I would fetch my books, where pure currents of mountain wind might winnow the pages as I read, and here I would make notes of the suggestions generated in mid-air, far away from the library dust and high above the ground-plane of criticism.

You may feel a touch of the fascination with which the experiment was surcharged if you will but hang your hammock ten or twelve feet above the ground in a tree on your own lawn. The vertical distance appears to magnify itself by a strong progression as the hammock is lifted, and I assure everybody that to swing at an altitude of fifty or more feet is possible only to those who have a good hold on their nerves. No dangerous experiment is more worth trying, however, by him who is sure not to fall, provided always that he have an imagination capable of filling in the blank spaces of experience with the

rose-mists and gold-dust perfumes of romance. By romance I do not mean that of the books; I refer to the subtler and finer dream-stuff of Nature—that more than gossamer-thin veiling which hangs over distant mountain peaks and shimmers on the horizon-line of a summer sea.

The hammock is at best much inclined to treachery, but there is a refinement in its faithfulness when it swings very high which escapes notice on a lower plane.

Believe me when I say that my first experience in the tree-top comes back to me now with a thrill which is almost a pang. The initial sensation was that of floating in mid-air, upheld by some magic as tricky and unreliable as the cool puffy gusts of wind that rustled by. The sheer fall to the ground under me I guessed at fifty-five feet, but just then my feelings exalted me indefinitely, while the elastic swaying motion imparted its influence to my brain, making my judgment waver fantastically. Once I thought I had fallen out, and I did come dangerously near it, but I clung to the meshes desperately and brought my aerial pirogue (the comparison is excellent) well under me, lapping the limp gunwales over my body. The blue-jays set up a screeching and chattering close at hand, ejaculating their vexation at my evasion of death, so it sounded, while the satin rustle of their wings came through the leafy spaces like strange words spoken under breath.

No sooner was I well lodged in my hammock than perfect confidence arrived, dispelling trepidation, calming my nerves and filling me with a sense of rare delight. Why should I fall out? Were I fifty feet lower I could tumble about at will, and to fall out would be next to impossible. I recalled the old philosopher's declaration that man dies only because his will falters and fades out, and I added that man falls from a hammock only after losing his head. By degrees I crept on to perfect mastery of the situation, and at the end of an hour I was swinging wildly by pulling at a hanging limb, while the blue-jays were squalling themselves hoarse in anticipation of my catastrophic destruction when a rope should break. I saw that all my fastenings held well, and that the boughs to which my hammock was anchored were, though long and flexible, too

strong for any force of mine to break, so I made a pendulum of myself and dashed back and forth regardless of danger.

This spurt of enthusiasm did not last long; it subsided and left me gently rocking and slipping into a light refreshing sleep. When I awoke the blue-jays had investigated me thoroughly, and had concluded evidently that I was not very interesting after all. The sun now lay low in the West against a sky whose splendour fell in golden mists upon the crowns of the distant mountains. I descended and cooked my supper; after I had eaten I rigged my tackle and whipped the pool in vain; not a bass broke the surface. Then exchanging my rod for my bow and quiver I strolled down along the stream's side, hoping to have a shot at some wild thing, if but a squirrel or a young hare, before night came on. My notes show that I shot eleven times and killed one grey squirrel; but I recollect that the sport was fine; it invariably is fine, hit or miss, if you are an archer; for watching the flight of an arrow, straight-sent, whispering lightly, curving over toward the game which it always appears to be going to hit, is, like the enjoyment of painting or poetry, its own reward, regardless of the outcome. Then what sound is like that made by a round-headed shaft striking a tree or bough in the solitude of the unbroken forest? Shall any musician ever draw forth from violin or piano a note more thrillingly sweet than the ringing of my bow-cord beside the Saliquoy? I returned to my little camp in the twilight, and just in time to have a glimpse of a monster bass as he leapt to the water's surface and whisked his shining tail in the air with a melodious splash that seemed to linger and hover over the widening rosette he had left on the bosom of the pool. A little green heron, frightened by the gymnastics of the fish, or by my appearance, I know not which, took to wing and flapped slowly away up the dimly gleaming course of the stream.

I lighted my lamp after having dressed my squirrel, and read Browning's poem, "Count Gismond," the finest bit of romance ever put into words. Few poems suit well to reading in the majestic presence of solitude; but Browning, when he comes upon a perfectly lucid interval, condenses, distils, and compresses the meanings of life into such nervous and masterful

verse as was never written by another man. I remember what a thrill went through me when first I read :

“Did I not watch him while he let
His armourer just brace his greaves;
Rivet his hauberk, on the fret
The while! His foot (my memory leaves
No least stamp out) . . . nor how anon
He pulled his ringing gauntlets on?”

Under the spell of the picture set in those words I lived for the moment the very life of the old chivalric Provençal days, when courage and love counted for so much with men and women. At the end I found myself longing for some opportunity to do a noble deed; could I offer higher eulogy of the poem?

Doubtless it would have afforded much astonishment to any one to have seen me at ten o'clock that night slowly clambering up to my hammock. Surely I must have been taken for a new species of man, arboreal in habit, the builder of a curious swinging nest!

To make sure of myself I tied the sides of the hammock together above my body, so that I could not fall out while the strings held, and there I lay watching the stars through the partings in the foliage until I fell asleep in the arms of the night-wind. Even in my half-dreams I felt the undulatory swaying of my aerial couch. Two or three times I awoke with a start to grope in my mind for knowledge of where I was and of how came I there. Once I heard a bass bolt out of the water with that well-known deep, liquid plunge-note; then the sweet voice of the river lulled me back to my dreams. A mocking-bird greeted the rising moon at about two o'clock with a slender, plaintive song that accorded perfectly with the ghostly light flung athwart the Eastern heaven. Toward morning a breeze arose and rocked my tree, swinging me as if I were in a little boat over wide low swells of the sea. An owl in a hollow of the forest bellowed resonantly, and was answered by another in a keen falsetto that cut the air like a rapier and lingered in whining echoes far and near. Presently the blue-jays began to stir, and a broad thin hint of daylight

flared out across the solitude. Dewy leaves brushed my hand as I thrust it forth; there was a freshness singularly accentuated in the air as I drew it into my lungs; surely no other man ever felt so fully the perfect meaning of healthful sleep. I untied the strings and flung wide the hammock, so that I could tumble in it and watch the birds. The blue-jays had made a sticky, straggling nest which I now discovered in a crotch a little below me, and about twenty feet away. Two eggs shone in it like mottled gems as the waving of the overhanging leaves shifted and modified the light. According to a fixed habit of mine, which makes me retrospective on such an occasion, I fell to wondering where the first blue-jay that ever lived on the earth built its nest, and out of what did it make it. I wish some Darwin or Huxley or other master of Nature's secrets would answer this question for me, so that I need never again ask it. If one could but know for certain that the birds are older than man, as the fossils indicate, this would relieve one's misgivings and shut out the fear that these winged bipeds are, indeed, strange aborted offshoots from one's own ancestral stem.

When the blue-jays came up to interview me just before sunrise I tried to converse with them in their own language. Some of their phrases I could turn very well by whistling in my hand. They set their heads to one side and eyed me in a friendly but reserved way. Evidently the female felt a delicacy about going upon her nest in my presence, so I descended to *terra firma* and took a plunge into the pool. After the cold bath came the coffee-making and the meat-broiling. My squirrel was young and tender, so I ate the whole of him with great pleasure. Just as I had finished, up went that great bass again, fairly jarring the pool to its centre. Forthwith the angling fever was upon me, and for more than an hour I used every art and wile known to the fly-fisherman without so much as the hint of a rise. Tired, vexed, almost disgusted, I betook me once more up to my hammock, bearing with me Isaac Walton's consoling volume, which, however, I did not open.

There were now three eggs in the blue-jay's nest, three elliptical life-globules (potential birds in a semi-liquid state)

neatly sealed in a shell of painted lime. I never tire of birds' eggs. They are as beautiful as flowers, and as mysterious as the origin of life. Think of it, a little blue, brown or green capsule of yolk and albumen with a minute jelly-like germ floating within; not a trace of animal heat or of animal life perceptible in it. Put this in a warm oven for a few days and lo, a bird! I pause and wonder and long for knowledge whenever I peep into one of these alchemist's crucibles, a bird's-nest, and see the tiny decorated mysteries called eggs, out of which, through the influence of heat, is soon to break the embodiment of restless beauty and vigilant, strenuous, melodious life. And, speaking of nests and eggs, it is a curious fact that while birds and their eggs have been found in a fossil state, no fossil nest has yet been reported. Even sub-fossil remains of recently extinct birds found in Madagascar and New Zealand afford us no evidence of nidification. The sands and the marls have preserved as if with loving care a stray feather here, a tiny bone there, and (in some casket of silica, the glittering jewel-box tucked between the folds of earth's imperishable corsage) an egg whose colours have disappeared and whose wonder of life is frozen into stone; but the homes of the ancient birds have perished for ever, because they were built upon the sand! Even the paleozoic woodpecker, found by Professor Marsh in our Western shales, kept with him no trace of the old tree within whose decaying stem he dug his den a million years ago. Such thoughts as these connect the vast solitudes of the past and the present. As I swung aloft in my tree-top, far away a resonant hammering echoed through the lonely wood: mayhap the pileated woodpecker delving for his food; but my imagination had whisked me back to the Tertiary age, and I realised that it was the echoing blows of *Deinornis* that I heard breaking the heavy silence of Nature.

We are fed upon decay, and even our souls are fertilised with the mould and marl of dead and dissolved ages. Our inquiries go back, reaching down into the deep, dark past (as the roots of plants grope into the earth) for wherewith to build up the tissues of faith. If the life of the bird has been a million years, must not the life of man be eternal? That which has

wrought the wonder of the egg has compassed the problem of immortality.

Day by day my swinging nest in the tree-top grew more fascinating to me, albeit I thought less and less of it while my mind reached out to bathe its tentacles (so to speak) in the new and fascinating element it had discovered. All around me there were invisible trickling veins of suggestion, currents of influence and effluence, dancing bubbles of fancy, music inaudible but impressive and alluring, ringing on and on to the farthest reach of space. Gently, rhythmically the south-east wind, its wings still tipped with the salt sprays of the Atlantic, rocked me to and fro, up and down, the green leaves rustling around me, the blue sky shimmering above. Small birds came and went through the tree-tops, some of them as silent and as richly tinted as wild flowers; and once a wide-winged gorgeous moth hovered over my face as if to study my features, then wandering away, an undulating vision, flickering farther and farther amid the soft gloom of the foliage.

I soon became so familiar with the hammock and so adjusted to its altitude and motion that I slept in it without the precaution of tying its sides over my body. Involuntarily and without inconvenience I subjected to all the demands of equilibrium, even in my deepest slumber. It must be remembered that I was as near the tip-top of my maple as I could safely anchor the hammock; and the tree, being slender, rocked back and forth with every current of air. It was a comfort at night, when but half awake, with the wind asleep beside me, to hear my friends the blue-jays rustle their dainty plumage and call to each other in low loving undertones. A little screech-owl, with his distressing voice, haunted a thicket midway up the hillside, where he wheezed and whined for hours together; but the mocking-birds compensated for this mistake of Nature's with a dreamy rapture of song, so tenuous and yet so satisfying, a filmy mist going up to fill the starry spaces above the trees.

My last night at the camp must be noted as specially memorable, for it was the one following my fight with that great bass. Did I capture it? The question is not in order.

Some relish for that fish-story must be held, even by force if necessary. Keep your mind on what is now forthcoming, for I dare say to you that you are about to read of an incident not paralleled in romance, and yet it is sketched as truthfully as the limited graphic power I possess will permit. On that last night came the crowning experience of my arboreal life.

It was rather late, eleven o'clock or past, when I mounted to my hammock and tumbled in. Baudelaire's poems, those strange red roses of evil, with their ineffable fascination and their melodious yet serpentlike movement, had held me by my lamp in the tent, filling me with a hideous yet delicious poison. The poet of evil strikes like a serpent hidden in a spray of tropical bloom. His lines are forked tongues, his words are fangs, and yet how sweet and beautiful! I lay awake a long while under the spell of what I had been reading. The wilderness was all silent and still, a dead calm in the air, save that the swirl of the pool sent up its liquid clamour. The stars appeared to swing low, and behind them the sky was very dark and rich without a fleece upon its surface. Presently I fell into a deep and heavy slumber, lying on my back in the motionless hammock. When I awoke I was tossing on stormy swells of wind, and vast black clouds were careering overhead. Surge after surge with increasing violence the turbulent current of the gale struck me and flung me high. The flexible boughs snatched me back, released me again, jerked me, shook me, tumbled me half-stifled among the leaves, whipped me with writhing twigs and bumped me against the gnarled elbows of the trees. I grabbed the meshes of the wallowing hammock and drew them about me closely.

It was clear that a sudden mountain gale had come across the valley, swooping down upon me like a hungry owl upon its prey. How curious it is that the first thing I thought of in the wild confusion of my waking was the safety of my blue-jay neighbours! I might have been sure on that score, however, for it is no mere galloping gale that blows a bird off its perch. Nature has fortified the little songsters against the exigencies of night and wind. In the bird's leg is a tendon (controlled by a flexor muscle) running down to the toes, and so arranged

that when the limb is flexed the foot is automatically closed. So the act of sitting, or squatting, upon a bough fastens the bird there as safely and immovably as if it were nailed to the wood with barbed spikes! Let the wild wind blow; so long as my blue-jay can keep his legs bent, so long will his feet clutch the branch or twig upon which he is perched. As for me, I did not dare try to leave my hammock, that would have been desperation with the trees tossing about so madly; all I could do was to cling to the meshes and draw them over me with hands and feet. The wind yelled and roared and bellowed; I thought every moment that it would rain, but the clouds simply thickened and the gusts came faster and harder. In the midst of the uproar and commotion I asked myself the question: "Are you afraid?" Gripping the hammock threads with desperate force, and giving way to some hysterical impulse, I yelled forth the answer with all the power of my voice: "Blow on! Blow on! I'm here to stay, if the ropes don't break!" A blue-jay responded in a scarcely reassuring tone, his low yet shrill cry, half anger, half despair, cutting the tumult through with a certain mordant celerity very remarkable.

When the gale reached its full force, as in a few moments it did, the experience was indescribable. To be at sea in a small boat when a white squall churns the water to foam is frightful enough, but to lie aloft in an open hammock amid the topmost boughs of a flexible, elastic maple-tree when a mountain wind is blowing great guns is worth a lifetime of tamer danger.

Each great throb or gust caught my tree and snatched it over so that it mingled its crashing branches with those of its neighbours and leaned perilously far, then releasing it, let it whisk back to be seized by the succeeding surge, which shook it and plunged forward with it more furiously and recklessly than had its leader. What if my ropes should break! The thought returned again and again with a peculiar thrill, but I set my jaws and yelled defiance through my teeth, having no better vent for my feelings.

Far away I heard the throbbing, watery boom of rain on the

hills. It was coming rapidly, driven by the wind, and I knew that I was doomed to a thorough soaking; but how could I prevent it? The mad currents of the storm were lifting me and shaking me as you have seen a pack of hounds fling up a fox and toss it from mouth to mouth.

Have you ever lain awake in your bed listening to the march of a coming rain? It is like the tramping of a million feet, the mingling of a million voices.

Suddenly a few large chilly drops struck me like bullets whirring along the wind; then followed the increasing sound of a hard-blown shower in the solitude and the night, striking the million tossing leaf-billows of the woods, and in a moment an almost level deluge plunged over me. It was a cool, almost cold water, in heavy, close-set drops; the force and the temperature made me catch my breath and shiver convulsively; then there came a flood, a pouring, raging torrent of finer drops borne by a long careering swell of the wind. Instantly my flannel clothes were soaked, and I felt as if suspended in a sea-current when the waves are flat and swift. Then the wind changed to savage short puffs. Up and down, back and forth I was jerked and swung and tossed, the boughs of the trees thrashing me across my face, limbs, body, the sprays of wet foliage mopping me vigorously, my eyes blinded and my ears full of water. My hands were chilled and my fingers cramped with holding on to the hammock's meshes.

How long it rained and blew I can only guess; but it was an age in the multitude of its experiences and in the significance of its suggestions. A touch of the infinite, a thrill of the all-powerful and untamable spirit of Nature must necessarily accompany such an adventure. Even now, across the space of years, I feel as sharply as then the currents of wild passion that rushed with the winds, and you will not deem me merely sentimental when I say that I caught from those high, hurrying streams of air, from the roaring rain and the weltering tree-tops, something to make my heart stronger and my vision clearer.

MAURICE THOMPSON.

THE BIBLIOMANIACS

SHE came slowly into the kitchen, a lexicon under one arm and three smaller books under the other; the most striking woman I had ever seen. Instinctively I felt that this must be my aunt.

As she stood looking gravely at me, I cannot define the weirdness of the impression she produced. It was hardly so much her features, though they—below the high forehead, with the grey unloosened hair falling thinly about it—were peculiar enough: it was the atmosphere of unwonted personality which seemed to circle outward from her presence, and fill the quaint old room from tile to oaken beam. For a moment or two she did not speak; then she deliberately set the three books down on a chair, retaining the lexicon under the left arm, and, still without speaking, advanced towards me, extending her hand.

"You are like him—as he was at twenty," she said; and her voice thrilled me strangely, as if a picture should utter sound. By "him" I divined she meant my father. Then her hand dropped, and she stood dreamily gazing into the fire, above which a great kettle hung singing from an antique crane.

If it had not been for the absolute abstraction and mystery of her manner, I should have felt embarrassed, but the whole seemed so like a passage in some romantic novel, that I felt poetic rather than perplexed.

This then was my father's sister whom I had never seen, and this the manner of her appearing! I could not withdraw my eyes from her. That tall figure, with its old-fashioned black drapery, fascinated me; so also did the head, with its large outlines and rumpled greyness of hair.

For a few moments my mind was swayed by opposing feelings: one, that of stimulating mystery; the other an uncomfortable consciousness that perhaps this visit of mine was undesired. I half repented of that sudden freak which had prompted me to make the acquaintance of this mystic aunt of

mine, and despatch a letter proposing a visit. The reply thereto had been short, and to my thinking peculiar, but it was all of a piece with what I now saw.

During this interval, my aunt, as if oblivious of my presence, gazed fixedly into the fire, which, burning cheerily, did something to mitigate the sense of neglect and disorder conveyed by the kitchen and my aunt's hair. I did not choose to interrupt her, and presently I saw that her lips began slowly to move. For a little, nothing was audible, and then, pronounced with slow distinction, came the words:

"'Three Halls, O weary Pilgrim, lead to the end of toils. Three Halls, O conqueror of Māra, will bring thee through three states into the fourth, and thence into the seven Worlds, the Worlds of Rest Eternal.'"

She paused; and after the falling of the mystic words there seemed to drop likewise the speech of a mystic silence. There was no sound other than the gentle noise of the fire and the solemn tick of the great clock.

Doubtless all this was highly poetic, and as such I felt it; but, for all that, it was a trifle too uncanny: besides, I was feeling hungry; so I thought it better to speak.

"I hope my visit doesn't inconvenience you, Aunt Caroline? It was exceedingly kind of you to say I could come."

Slowly she withdrew her eyes from the fire, and turned them full upon me. Her words, when she replied, were few, but there was a certain odd kindness in the tone which did much to set me at ease.

"My brother's son is wholly welcome. I trust he will stay long—as long as he likes. But there is much to put up with—principally books."

Then she turned, took up the three volumes laid on the chair, and vanished, leaving me in some uncertainty as to what I was expected to do.

I had reached the town of Kustwick towards the close of the afternoon, and as Dowlsdale Manor, my aunt's dwelling, was ten miles out to the west, had been driving for several hours, wondering greatly at the wild and sterile appearance of the country through which I travelled. But if this was sombre

and barren, that immediately surrounding the manor had a gloom far more intensified, with sterility in the shape of a dreary grandeur, though the deepening twilight made it difficult to define the details of landscape. That there were phantoms of bleak hills and a nightmare of forest, with an antique mansion set thereamidst, was the only impression I gained from the shadowy vision vouchsafed me. Arrived at the house, the carman deposited my portmanteau at the door with an alacrity that seemed prompted by fear of supernatural calamity should he loiter in the dread locality, accepted his fare with equal despatch, and, jumping on his vehicle, was quickly swallowed in twilight. For a minute I stood and listened to the retreating rumble of wheels, gazing with wonder into the stern obscurity by which I was encircled; then I knocked at the nail-studded door, and waited, looking up at the dark, high mass of the house above me, with its lofty gables and mullioned lattices. Nobody came, and I rapped again. Still there was no answer, and if it had not been for a light that burned dimly in an upper window, I should have believed the place deserted. Getting no reply to my third knock, I ventured to push the door, which, to my surprise, yielded slowly, creaking inward on its hinges, into a large, grim entrance-hall, lightless as a vault. From this I had somehow managed to make my way to the kitchen, and it was here that Aunt Caroline found me, as I have just described.

After her abrupt departure I sat down in a chair, determined to wait with fortitude the course of events.

For half an hour nobody came near me. Then there was a distant clatter of slipshod feet, and the owner thereof, an untidy maidservant in archaic attire, made a tumultuous appearance. I judged that my presence was unexpected by her ejaculating, "Oh, Blunderbus!" and her standing stock-still in the centre of the apartment. Her composure, however, was soon regained, and, without waiting for explanation, she asked in the quaintest manner, with a gleam of humour in her sharp little eyes:

"Be you Mr. Maudle, as be comed on a visit?"

I replied that I was that individual, carefully pronouncing

my name as it was our family custom to spell it—namely, Mordell. “Maudle” I felt an offence: it suggested excess of beer and dimness of mental vision.

“I doubt you’ll be wanting some vittles,” was the next remark.

I returned a suitable reply, which elicited the further observation that:

“It was uncomfortable work, it was, sitting wi’ a wanting stomach!”

Whereupon it appeared manifest that whatever function this outspoken young person might discharge in the Manor-house, she not only enjoyed much freedom of speech, but was in no wise inclined to put too fine a point upon matters, or to clothe her sentiments in decorative language. Seeing that she appeared to regard me with approval, I ventured to express a desire that my portmanteau, which still remained outside, might be taken up to my room by one of the other servants. This appeared to tickle my companion as something of exquisite humour, for she straightway went off into gusty laughter that blew itself out in the words:

“There *baint* not no other servants. All as there is is *me*!”

I begged pardon at once, though there appeared no pressing reason to do so; and the abigail, charmed by my politeness, blandly informed me she would “lug up my box i’ a bang,” after she had placed some refreshment before me. She accordingly set the table in a somewhat original manner, dabbing plates here and there haphazard; the vacant spaces between being sprinkled with cutlery in the fiercest manner. After the repast—chiefly mutton and bread—was thus scattered, the young person, with a commendatory smile, departed; and I subsequently heard considerable rumbling and banging in a remote part of the mansion. “Doubtless the ordering of my chamber,” I thought, and continued placidly eating. Just as I had finished, the vigorous handmaid returned, strenuously supporting a massive brass candlestick, and, upon her breezy exhortation, I rose to be conducted to my room.

“But shall I not see my aunt again?” I ventured to inquire, as we went up a vast, creaking staircase.

"What, Missus? Not much, you won't! Her's a-swallowing of a cyclepeedy and ain't to be disturbed not for men nor devils!"

From the staircase we entered a long, dark corridor, with doors at each side; and just as we approached the middle, one of them suddenly opened.

Of the figure that stood in the doorway I have never seen the like. It was an elderly man of medium height. His hair was long and white, and stuck out from his little head in grotesque pieces, not as if merely dishevelled, but as tossed to a storm of fine frenzy. His eyes were large and brilliant; they burnt in the wasted face like supernal fires. A long white nightgown further intensified the wildness of his appearance. If it had not been for my guide, I believe I should have speedily retreated, but as she was perfectly calm, I merely took a step or two backwards, the old man following me with a hungry look, as if I were an article of food.

"You have come, then, at last?" were the words he screamed rather than uttered. "Your murdered brother awaits you. It has long gone six by the abbey clock—but you forget. It was æons ago, in the sunrise time of the worlds. I have read somewhere——"

"Oh, you're always reading, *you* are!" the maid interposed. "You'll get your death o' cold standing there i' your night-shirt like a screeching gutcher. Get into bed this minute; or I'll take every bit o' your book-trash and bake bread wi' it to-morrow i' the brick oven!"

The last words were accompanied by a short struggle, and the subsequent closing and locking of the door.

"Who in *Heaven's* name is that creature?" I asked.

"Well, you're a pretty sort o' young gentleman, *you* are, to talk o' folks as are married to your own flesh an' blood, as if they was beasts o' the field! That's your Uncle Tobias, an' no other body!"

That my aunt was married I was, of course, aware, but that she was united to a madman I did not know: the revelation was unpleasantly astonishing.

That night I had fantastic dreams, for which, possibly, my

bedroom was responsible. It was very vast, very dreary; a sort of mausoleum of antique furniture.

I suppose it would be somewhere in the early hours of the morning when, having suddenly woken, I thought I detected a faint, creeping sound, as of some one moving stealthily in the room. I listened intently, hardly daring to breathe. Yes, the sound was clearly audible; the distinct movement as of feet and dress. All at once the thought of my crazy uncle darted across my brain. What might he not do in that poetic frenzy of his? Or could it be in very deed a ghost? It seemed almost as if my eyes and ears, drawn with magnetic power to the thing, whatever it was, were being forced out of my head, so intensely did I strain them in that creeping blackness. For the darkness *did* creep: it crawled over and about me like a breathing, limbless life. Every moment I expected the touch of stealthy fingers, or the sudden leap and the choking grip of madness. From head to foot I was damp with the sweat of dread. The impulse to jump out of bed and strike a light was opposed by the sense that absolute stillness was perhaps my only chance of safety. How long I stayed thus I have no idea: possibly ten minutes—it might have been an hour. I only know that all about me drew a death-black horror, as of some shapeless terror, piercing me with many eyes—eyes that I felt the gaze of, but could in no wise see. Utter stillness brooded in the great mansion; no sound—after that mysterious rustle had ceased—of any living thing. I might have been buried alive, deep in the burial caves of a forgotten world. I lay listening till dawn. Then, as the strong May sunrise, with broad golden shoulders, began to heave glorious weights of colour up the steep blue east, I dropped into a doze, and did not wake again till I found the sunshine drenching my chamber with its yellow rain.

Downstairs I found things much as I had left them the previous evening. Since supper had been served in the kitchen, and I concluded breakfast would be set there likewise, thither I straightway repaired. A fire stirred briskly; the clock pointed to eight; but there was no other indication of breakfast, unless the remnants of last night's supper, still uncleared away, were

to be regarded in the light of preparation. As these relics failed to keenly stimulate my appetite, I went to the window for a pleasanter prospect. While thus engaged, I was suddenly startled by a gentle tap on the shoulder, and, turning quickly, stood face to face with my uncle Tobias. His appearance was modified into a somewhat less unearthly form, the tempest of hair being lulled by a Turkish smoking cap, and the night-shirt replaced by a dressing-gown and trousers gone greatly to seed. With much presence of mind I offered my hand, which was received with gracious blandness, quite as if my presence were an honoured pleasure.

"My wife is not yet down," he remarked, "though she has been *up* since daybreak."

I smiled appropriately at the insipid joke, and he continued pleasantly :

"I trust you will excuse our somewhat irregular ways with regard to meals and other mundane customs. Our literary labours keep us greatly employed, and we always look upon eating quite as a tiresome formality—*quite* as a tiresome formality."

I replied that I deemed myself fortunate to have found entrance to so intellectual a household, adding that I held unconventional living as the very summit of bliss. This gratifying my uncle hugely, he forthwith launched himself on a perfect ocean of speculation as to the history and origin of books, a subject with which he appeared exhaustively acquainted. Really his talk was so rational, so entirely free from the vagaries of madness, that I caught myself more than once wondering if this could indeed be the maniac I had seen last night in the corridor. All at once, in the middle of his discursive talk, my uncle, spying the maidservant sauntering idly up the garden, trotted briskly to the door, and in a high, thin voice called out, "Carlotta! Breakfast!"

I afterwards ascertained that the real name of this remarkable young woman was Harriett, but that her master, with a peculiar penchant for sounding appellations, had insisted upon christening her Carlotta. As far as personal appearance went, a name more completely antithetic could hardly have been

bestowed, for Harriet Hodgkiss was short, plain-featured, and muscular, with enormous red arms, and feet like a farm-horse.

Carlotta, thus summoned, emitted a sort of roar, and continued her slow promenade, as if her arrival at the house, though doubtless a desired event, partook too largely of the nature of a philanthropic movement for any unbecoming haste. When at length she arrived in the kitchen, she proceeded leisurely, after nodding affably to me, to disarrange its furniture more completely — if that were possible — than it had been before. I think I never beheld, either before or since, any one so adept in the science of general disorder, or possessed of so shining a genius for the demolition of crockery.

After breakfast I explored the garden. There was no dinner that day ; but I was informed by Carlotta that I might visit the larder whenever I felt inclined. We did, indeed, have a species of meat tea, at which my aunt presided with preoccupied grace and a large volume—"The Origin of the Celtic Races" I believe it was called ; and it appeared to exert considerable fascination over her, for she poured tea into the sugar-basin, and performed other pleasing little feats of similar self-abstraction. It tended to inspire one with a disconcerting sense that, although her bodily presence might indeed appear to stoop to the fleshly sphere of the stomach, her spirit sate ever on far-off heights, inaccessible to the tea-drinking mind.

Uncle Tobias likewise perused a learned work, but as he occasionally read aloud in an unknown tongue, it lent a social atmosphere to the meal which otherwise might have been lacking. Carlotta and myself were the only persons of the party who fed our vile bodies regardless of higher nutrition.

From teatime till sundown I wandered about the valley and the lonely heights above it, more and more astonished at that rugged wilderness, with its solemn dumbness of hill and wood, and the stream that raved on between them like a strangled voice that they could not kill.

Such was the first day, and those succeeding, to the extent of five or six, were marked with little diversity. During all that time I saw no other inmate of the house nor beheld any

intercourse had with the outer world. Postmen shunned the locality; neither butcher nor baker approached thereto. The garden supplied a few last heads of Savoy; and once I beheld the brick-oven disgorge itself of bread. Meat did indeed make a cautious appearance, but for all I could see of human means of conveyance, its advent was as miraculous as the viands of Elijah the Tishbite. I soon discovered that in all matters pertaining to diet Carlotta reigned supreme. If one craved breakfast—any time from seven till twelve—one propitiated Carlotta. Dinner was not a recognised meal, being a spasmodic refecton wholly in the gift of Carlotta. As for tea, the hour and substance of that depended on the arbitrary will of a single individual; and that person was still Carlotta. Me she occasionally favoured with the option of choice regarding the latter meal; but then I was a visitor—that is, a species of humanity so utterly foreign to DOWLSDALE MANOR that I felt myself a rare variety to which there attached an interest well-nigh prehistoric.

As for my nights, I began to fear I should lose my reason: twice again was I disturbed at dead of night by ghostly noises in my chamber. I endeavoured to solve the mystery by questioning Carlotta; but she either returned enigmatic answers or else bemocked me for imaginative folly. After the third visitation, however, I determined to drive her to extremities, so, waiting my opportunity one day when her hands were imprisoned in the dough-pan, I accosted her thus:

"Carlotta, there *are* noises in my bedroom at night. I've heard them *distinctly* three times!"

Carlotta kneaded vigorously, and merely ejaculated, "Pistols and Blood!" She relished such-like expressions, being slightly given to melodramatic fiction.

"I swear you know *something* about it!" I went on, "and I insist upon knowing the truth."

Carlotta slowly tore a piece of dough out of the great earthenware kneading-vessel, cut it away from the larger mass, and plumped it down on the board.

"Did you ever hear tell o' the saying: 'A long ear an' a strong bray belong to the self-same baste'?" she demurely

asked. "If you get to no worse nor *hearing* you'll come at no very great hurt. If there was to come a knife at your gullet one o' these nights, you might ha' summat to scream at."

Absurd as it may seem, her words thrilled me; and I suppose my face betrayed emotion, for she added, not unkindly:

"Don't you take on a'thatns, Mr. Maudle. You needn't be afear'd at no knives. This here house is a rum hole for noisings—ghosts belike; I nayther know nor care. But you just take my advice: enjoy your pleasure, and give over your questions."

Here she took the dough she had been rolling, and dropped it deftly into a tin.

Seeing that further interrogation would offend, I left her sprinkling flour for the next piece of dough, and went out into the garden. Here I found Aunt Caroline wandering up and down the long, weedy terrace, immersed in a book. As usual, she did not perceive my approach, being as preoccupied with her reading as if the earth she trod were a shifting shade, and the sky a vault of blue vision.

It was a strange picture. The tall, black-robed woman pacing slowly along the terrace, with its mouldering urns and lichen-tinted balustrade; the tangle of garden below her, the grey pile of Gothic behind; while all around swept that great solitude of hills, silent and rough-hewn, like a fragment out of primeval time.

That worldless, studious woman exercised upon me a growing fascination. Day after day she read and wrote, speaking but rarely, and then often in mysterious utterance, which was to me mere cryptological darkness. So far as I could observe, her garb and manner were invariable: the first belonged to a remote antiquity—presumably that of the Pharaohs; the second to rapt bibliomania. Once she invited me to inspect her study. From top to bottom it was books. There were books concealing the walls; books cumbering the table; books seated on chairs; books crouched on the floor; books adoze on the sofa; books on the window-ledge, scanning the landscape. And in the midst of it all sat my aunt, herself like an old-fashioned volume, in binding coeval with the advent of "Villette." As

for Uncle Tobias, his apartment was not less provided with literature; the distinctive feature being that, while Aunt Caroline's library suggested some shadowy striving after order, his own was wholly chaotic. The shelves were loaded with books in all sorts of uncomfortable attitudes; some supporting each other in tipsy line; some prostrate, weary with wisdom; while others lay on their backs, and, as it were, kicked their erudite heels in the air. The floor presented the appearance of a mountainous district, with learned valleys and literary heights. This room I was careful to avoid at night; for toward sundown Uncle Tobias was wont to grow more or less animated, and a companion with whom it was more exciting than agreeable to consort.

Unwilling to disturb my aunt, I returned to the house, thinking to traverse its grim suites of rooms, while as yet mysterious shadows had not begun to lurk in their dusty corners. After roaming up and down for nearly an hour, examining old cabinets, armour, and innumerable relics of a bygone eld, I at length sought the garrets; chill, deserted chambers in the gables, tenanted by mice and the corpses of past generations of furniture. I loved these garrets, desolate and chill though they were. They seemed so lifted up above the earth, so absorbed in converse with the sun and the wind and the rain, so full of a world that had stepped softly aside into forgetfulness, long before the century was born.

As it often happened, I carried a book, for, though by no means a bibliomaniac, I was a devoted lover of reading; and this queer old-world manor was an ideal place to read in: one could hardly wonder that its owners had gone far in that fine madness.

To-day it was Poe's poems; and after reading "*Ulalume*," I turned to that weirdest of weird productions, "*The Raven*." Whether it was the emotional temper of my mind at that particular moment, or whether the effect of my surroundings, I could not tell, but certain it is that, when I came to the third stanza, and almost coincident with the words—

"And the silken, sad uncertain rustling of each purple curtain
Thrilled me . . ."—

I could have taken my oath that I *heard* a rustling behind me with the startled ears of my body. I turned my head quickly, but nothing was visible—nothing but the old garret with its damp-stained walls. I continued reading. Then, as stanza after stanza I followed the fantastic imagery, the silence of the ancient room I sat in seemed to gather intensity, and yet, when I paused, to be haunted by thin phantasms of music that slid out of my book without any sound.

In one of these long pauses my eyes, having left the page, glanced idly over the edge of the book down into the obscurity of the narrow staircase, the top step of which was my seat. Suddenly vagueness of vision was turned to the concentration of horror. There, near the foot of the dim stairway, was distinctly visible a pallid face—a grey, ghostly visage, with eyes that fastened upon me with a look of stealth.

For a moment or two I was petrified; and before I had time to move or speak the face had vanished, and I heard the grating noise of a rusty lock.

It was some little time ere I gathered up courage to stir; then, rebuking myself for my cowardice, I quickly descended the stairs. The door at the bottom was, as I dreaded, locked. I was a prisoner; fastened securely in a dreary garret!

As I stood thus in the shadow at the foot of the stairs, all sorts of horrible fancies came swarming into my brain. All the horrors I had ever heard or read of seemed to press upon me in one massed confusion, from which individual terrors now and then detached themselves to assume distinctive shape. Now it was a murder in a lonely house—and what house more lone than Dowsdale Manor?—now a ghastly visitation from the regions of the dead. I have no means of ascertaining whether my hair did in reality stand on end, as that growth is reported to do on occasions of a stimulating nature, but I certainly fully enjoyed some peculiar sensation in my scalp, and I am quite confident that I very freely perspired; an unpleasing custom of mine on the slightest nervous incentive. By and by, however, agitation somewhat subsiding, I began to exert my reason. First, I banished the notion of ghosts: apparitions locked no doors. Then I dispelled the idea of murder: assassins

did not appear to one in daylight and then lock one up. They came panther-like behind, and plunged a dagger under one's left shoulder. It must have been a freak of my uncle's; towards evening he usually enlarged the borders of his weird personality; and this securing of relatives under lock and key was probably only one of his numerous little oddities. Still, although I determined that my uncle was the harmless cause, I could not quite rid myself of uneasy sensations. Carlotta had several times entertained me with gruesome local stories, and these bloody and dark-hued tales had gained an addition of horror from the gloomy and lonely district which had served as the scene of their action.

I ascended the stairs, and again sat down; there being nothing to do but wait patiently till some one should come to release me. True, that might be some time; for even if I pounded the door, the garrets were so far removed from the kitchen, that Carlotta would never hear, and as for Aunt Caroline, nothing short of a cyclone or the Apocalyptic trump would suffice to raise her from the depths of her sea-like encyclopædias.

I shivered a little; for evening drew on, and the garret was chill. Outside, the wind went by with a breathy moan, and rustled the ivy below the window. Up the lower part of the latter a piece of ivy had crept half-way. The evening light, falling through it, lent it a rare pale green; and now and then it shuddered, as if plucked at by unseen hands. I knew it was only the wind, yet each time the ivy shuddered a peculiar thrill ran through me. Sometimes a mouse peeped out of a hole and sniffed the air, till the dread of a visionary cat sent it scuttling quickly back. Once I was startled by a sound in the roof—probably a pigeon outside on the tiles.

Gradually the light began to fail. I went over to the window and looked out. Slow, black clouds came labouring up from the west, urged on by the rising wind; the woods gloomed darkly in the shadow of the hills; the stream rushed, swirling, down its rocky bed; the whole of the narrow valley grew dim with the grey of twilight. I returned to my seat at the head of the staircase.

I must have sunken into a sort of reverie, for when I roused myself again the garret was very dark. A star or two twinkled keenly far away in the outer dusk, and the ivy against the casement was nothing but a quiver of shadow. Peering into the gloom about me, I was arrested by a dark figure-like object a little to the right of the window. It was very tall, and stood motionless as death—the ghost, or the assassin?

Gathering all my energy, I rose and advanced towards it. It made no movement whatever. What if it waited for a spring!

I stood irresolute; then advanced with determination, and grasped the thing with my arms. It was an upright wooden post, supporting a sunken beam.

By this time I was growing a little out of temper; so I determined to try what I could do by breaking the lock of my prison. Taking a run down the stairs, I charged with full force at the door. I might as well have flung myself against the bole of a growing tree; for the door was of solid oak. I kicked, I shook, I hammered; and for any effect produced I might have gone on battering till I dropped with sheer exhaustion. Hot, hungry and out of breath, I returned to my former seat.

How long I remained there I cannot tell, but probably for several hours; long enough for a wild storm to rave like a windy hell, and then sweep the sky clear and silent for the sacred rising of the moon. Up over the bleak hills she rose like a rounded vision of sleep; and the garret came out of blackness into a strange twilight, with a flame of silver on the right-hand wall.

It must have been near midnight when I woke from a doze to hear a low, resonant sound, like the continuous tones of a voice. I listened intently. As nearly as I could tell, it came from somewhere behind me. Getting up, therefore, and going towards the sound, I was surprised to find that in a deep recess was a door which had escaped my notice. After some little search I found the latch, lifted it, and softly opened the door. Passing through, I found myself in another garret, larger than the first, and in which the voice could be heard distinctly. It was a woman's, clear and musical, with contralto depth. Light issued from a crevice in the wall, evidently that of a still

further room. I stepped cautiously across the floor, and placed my ear to the crack.

What I heard I shall never forget. That musical voice with its perfect cadences, the magic of the words, the subtle flow of the rhythm! The poem I knew well; it was "The Holy Grail"; but as to the reader, I was plunged in astonishment. Carlotta was out of the question: one might as well think of a thrashing machine, and though Aunt Caroline had emitted sound but rarely, I knew that that voice could not proceed from her. After a little came silence; and there being nothing more for the ear, I tried the effect of my eye. The narrowness of the crevice did not allow of much vision, but the little I saw was impressive enough.

The room I looked into was lined with tapestry, pictures and books—but the latter, of course, one expected to find everywhere in Dowlsdale Manor; for, as Carlotta grimly remarked, "The master might go mad as the moon, an' the missus turn a tattered-boggard, they'd ha' books for their mate and drink, and books to read i' their coffins!"

From the centre of a beam hung a quaint oil-lamp; and beneath this vessel, her face half hidden by falling hair, was a girl of, perhaps, eighteen. She was seated on a low footstool, her book on a high, black chair beside her.

Of course her beauty was of that transcendent sort which is too divinely rare for the masculine tongue to stammer of?

It was nothing of the kind. There *was* beauty, but it was rather the beauty of music or shadow; you felt it rather than saw.

For several minutes I gazed in silent amazement before I dared to speak. It seemed so very embarrassing to address through a crack in the wall a girl one had never before seen, still less had imagined the existence of. For all that, I was anxious for deliverance from captivity, and to speak seemed my only chance. Summoning all my audacity, therefore, I placed my mouth where my ear and eye had been, and, in as agreeable a tone as I could command, said:

"Excuse me—but I'm afraid I must—that is, if you don't mind—I can't get out; I've been locked in!"

Confused though this announcement was, I hoped it might produce a favourable effect, so I hastily put my ear to the crevice. No answer came, however; and when I looked in again the chamber was empty. For a while I waited, lost in speculation as to who this mysterious maiden might be, and whether it was to her secret habitation of the manor that were attributable all the ghostly noises I had previously heard. Since she was only seen by day, it seemed likely that she walked abroad only at night. Possibly she had known as little of my existence as I of hers, and had thus unknowingly passed through my bedroom, which had several doors leading to other chambers. That would easily account not only for uncanny noises, but also for Carlotta's mysterious speech. This remarkable girl was evidently so completely possessed of bibliomania—which would appear a disease inducing complications of mental disorder and peculiar social conduct—that she had secluded herself entirely from the presence of her kind, to bring forth into fullest maturity some germ of eccentric intellect.

On coming to this conclusion I returned to my former prison, and at once descended the staircase to try the door. It was wide open. Then I went down to the kitchen, to find it in total darkness, one or two embers dying dimly in the grate. The house itself was in a tomb-like silence.

Next day I interviewed Carlotta.

"Carlotta," I said, "*who* is the lady that lives secretly in the garrets?"

Without even looking at me, she replied in the quietest tone:

"She's granddaughter by the mother's side o' the King o' Mesopotamia."

"Now none of your rubbish!" I said. "I'll find out who she is, if I turn the house upside down!"

"Well," returned Carlotta with exasperating coolness, and a knowing glance from her keen black eyes, "if you're so death-some determined about it, you'd best threaten them as locked you up yesterday!"

"Yes, that's another thing I mean to know! Who took that confounded liberty?"

"Well, you needn't get ready to swallow me! I didn't lock you in! Go to your Uncle Tobias. He's allys a-locking folks in and a-barring of 'em out—comes on him wi' a spasm-like, same as the gobbles. He tried it wi' *me* onced, but he never done it again! For as soon as iver I'd gotten loosed, I locked *him* up for a fortnit!"

"An excellent plan," I remarked. "I perceive, Carlotta, you are a young person of decisive action."

"An' a mercy for some folks as I am! For let me tell *you*, Mr. Maudle, as if it wasn't for me, an' the ways as I manage 'em, the Master an' Missus an' Miss Alma——"

"Otherwise known as the King of Mesopotamia's granddaughter?" I interposed.

Carlotta straightway vanished.

And now life became romantic indeed. Every day I did my utmost to find some clue to the mystery of the hidden maiden who dwelt amid the gables in poetic retirement. I even approached Aunt Caroline on the matter, but I might as well have approached the encyclopædias. My uncle, indeed, when questioned, enlightened me by the impressive information that the strange young lady was not merely a descendant of the Mesopotamian monarch, but—and here I was enjoined to maintain strictest secrecy—that she only awaited the death of an uncle to come to the crown of Peru.

One night I was sitting up late, reading in the kitchen, when, close upon one o'clock, the door was softly opened, and the garret lady came through, her long hair like a mantle over her shoulders, her face pallid as death. On sight of me, the blood rushed to her cheeks and an angry look gleamed in her grand, dark eyes. As for me, I rose like an enchanted fool before a vision of Paradise.

After that, she was no more the viewless lady of the garrets. Even in broad daylight she was to be met with in the corridors. And then it was that between sunrise and sunset, and from sunset till moonrise, my life dwindled to nothing but a constant contrivance to meet her. At first she appeared angry, and would pass with a chilling bow, but gradually a change came over her, even to the very eyelash.

How it came about I really don't know, but one day we were actually together in her garret study. And then my feelings utterly overcame me, and I begged her to tell me who she was.

"I am Uncle Tobias's niece," she answered; and when I pressed her further—"I am one of the bibliomaniacs."

What madness I uttered after, I was too full of emotion to recall. What I do remember is that, in that wonderful way of hers, she went to a quaint old book-case, and, taking a "Tennyson" from a shelf, opened it with her strange smile, pointing to words that made me almost blind with passion:

"And I will love thee to the death,
And out beyond, into the dream to come."

OLAF BAKER.

DEAD LOVE

I N the damp earth,
When skies were dark above,
I buried Love.

And kneeling there,
While all the world grew dim,
I wept for him:

And laid the glory
And the dreams he gave
Low in his grave.

LILIAN DOUGLAS.

IN MODERN SPAIN

ELECTRA AND THE PROGRESSIVE MOVEMENT

IT is probable that, beyond dim associations with Greek drama, the word "*Electra*" conveys no definite impression to the English reader. Yet throughout Spain during the present year this word has been the battle-cry around which opposing parties have fought, a word highly charged with social and religious issues of momentous character.

Electra is a play produced at the Theatre Español in Madrid on January 30 last, and is the latest work of the popular and prolific novelist and dramatist Benito Perez Galdos. Though still in the prime of life, Galdos, who is a native of the Canary Islands, has long occupied a very prominent position in the Spanish world of letters. It can, indeed, scarcely be said that he appeals, like Valera, to the lover of fine literature and delicate observation of life. But if Valera is, on a smaller scale, the George Meredith or the Thomas Hardy of contemporary Spain, Galdos is at once its Mrs. Humphry Ward and its Sir Walter Besant, and at the same time something more than that, for he not only voices the aspirations of religious liberalism and social progress, but is at the same time the exponent of the national and patriotic spirit of his country. He is a writer whose sympathies, though always on the side of advance, never carry him to extremes—a somewhat rare gift in Spain—so that he has usually been able to avoid injuring dangerous susceptibilities while placing himself in the vanguard of forward movements. Never before, however, has Galdos so conspicuously become the banner-bearer in a great popular movement. The times, indeed, were ripe; the battle which raged last year around the confinement of Adela de Ubaio in a convent had convulsed Spain and threatened to become a kind of Spanish Dreyfus affair. Galdos states, and with truth, that he has concentrated into *Electra* the ideas that have animated

the whole of his career, but the public at once identified *Electra* with Adela de Ubao, and the whole discussion was thus transferred to the field of art, where it could receive at once more poignant and more generalised expression. In the course of a few months 25,000 copies of *Electra* were sold—for Spain an enormous number—and its author has become a popular hero. *Electra* is the symbol of progress and of revolt against clericalism and Jesuitism, and at the present time at least two or three different periodicals are published bearing the name of the play.

On the other side all the forces of the Church are drawn up in array against *Electra*. Bishops have everywhere fulminated vigorously, and have forbidden the faithful to attend the performances. They have sometimes appealed (as the Bishop of Gerona has lately done) to the secular authorities to prohibit the representations, but always in vain, for there is not a word in the play which can possibly be construed into an offence against the law, or even against the canons of good taste. So, although Spain is popularly supposed to be a "priest-ridden" country, the anathemas of the Church have been launched in vain; *Electra* has been played throughout Spain to crowded audiences of both sexes, who have received it with immense enthusiasm, singing the *Marseillaise* and Riego's hymn, which is the Spanish equivalent of the French anthem. Seldom before in modern times, not even when *Hernani* was produced in Paris, has a play aroused such enthusiasm throughout the length and breadth of a country.

It certainly cannot be said that Galdos has initiated a literary or dramatic revolution. He is neither a Victor Hugo nor an Ibsen. *Electra* is an interesting and well-written play, but its methods are a little old-fashioned; it even resorts to the supernatural; certainly it could have aroused no excitement, even in Spain, at any less favourable moment. Its importance lies solely in the fact that it has given expression to the latent progressive and anti-clerical feelings throughout a country which has hitherto been regarded as of all the chief European countries the least progressive and the most hopelessly bound to the Church.

Electra is a young girl of eighteen, the daughter of a mother who has disgraced herself by running away from home; her father is unknown, and she has been adopted by a very wealthy and pious aunt in Madrid, Doña Evarista, the wife of Don Urbano Garcia Yuste, an easy, good-natured man, who falls in with his wife's devout practices and extensive schemes of charity, with the vague idea that men are regenerated by their wives, and that a woman's piety will compensate for her husband's laxity. Doña Evarista's spiritual director is Don Pantoja; she is entirely in his hands, so that the whole Garcia Yuste household is absolutely controlled by Pantoja, who is described as a sort of honest Tartufe. Pantoja has set himself, with all the energy of his domineering nature, to gain spiritual possession of Electra, and to induce her to enter a convent, and he feels justified in shrinking from no means which may enable him to gain his end. She has no vocation to a religious life. She is a wayward, charming, capricious child, slightly neurotic, indeed, but entirely innocent, only desiring to be left alone, to amuse herself with children, flowers, even dolls, an unconscious maternal instinct being thus suggested. She embodies Galdos' ideas of pure and natural girlhood, left, as it should be, to follow its own impulses. Electra associates much with her cousin Maximo, a young widower, who is engaged in working out chemical problems of great importance, and is known in the family as the Magician, *el magico prodigioso*, but is regarded by the author as the representative of the modern spirit, the "breath of fresh air" in a stifling atmosphere. She acquires skill in assisting him in his laboratory, watches over his domestic life, becomes attached to his children, at last falls in love with him. The affection is mutual, and is detected in its earliest stages by Pantoja, who, finding all other methods fail, at last brings forward—whether in good faith or in bad remains obscure—the unfounded suggestion that she is quite right to love Maximo, that it is indeed her sacred duty to do so, because he is really her half-brother. This idea for the moment turns Electra's brain, and she is led away to the convent. Now, however, Maximo is fully roused; he pours a torrent of indignant invective on the head of Pantoja—who, however, is treated

by the dramatist with considerable tenderness, and always retains his dignity and self-possession—and with the aid of an old friend of the family, the Marques de Ronda, and the connivance of Sor Dorotea, the nun who has been placed in charge of Electra, he enters the convent garden at night and rescues her under Pantoja's eyes. "Are you fleeing from me, my daughter?" asks Pantoja. "No, she is not fleeing; she is coming to life," answers Maximo; "resucita." That word, with which the play ends, has been seized upon with enthusiasm, as the key to the whole situation. Spain "is coming to life."

Electra has become the watchword of many belonging to the most extreme anti-religious, free-thinking, and revolutionary parties in Spain. Galdos himself, however, is still by no means an extremist; as he has shown in previous books, he is fully able to sympathise with all that is best and freest in the mystical, religious temper of his countrymen. He has lately taken an opportunity of explaining his position. He is not opposed to the Church, he tells us; on the contrary, he thinks the Church should be preserved, but he wishes to check the growth of monasticism, which has, he believes, attained alarming dimensions during the past century, and to restrain the undue influence of the Church on secular life. "Do not touch the secular clergy!" he exclaims, and even among the monastic orders he is willing to uphold those which, like the Augustinians and the Carmelites, retain an atmosphere of poetry, reserving his indignation for those, more especially the Jesuits, who preach a barren ideal of gloomy virtue and whose "diabolical inspiration" tends to dry up the fountains of life. It is a studiously moderate programme, though not one likely to be quite satisfactory to either party, certainly not to the Church, whose practical influence would thus be minimised, and which might not unfairly contend that Galdos would only reserve to it the rôle which Don Urbano left to his wife, the privilege of strenuously working for the regeneration of a world which is yet to be allowed to preserve its own comfortable laxity. Galdos remains a man of letters, too sympathetic and many-sided to take up an extreme position; and while it is doubtless his ambition to be

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at the head of a great popular movement of moderate reform, he is scarcely the stuff of which leaders are made.

It may be doubted, indeed, whether Spain is a land in which moderate reforms of any kind are easily possible. Endless as have been its merely superficial political revolutions, there has never been a social revolution in Spain ; and it is difficult to see how such a revolution could be other than disastrous to some vital element of the national life. Sober and temperate as the Spaniards are in most respects, their convictions in spiritual matters have ever tended to run to extremes. In this they are like their own climate, for they live in a land which is never temperate but always subject to the contending clash of heat and cold, of blazing sun and icy blast. The first Christian persecutors and the first Christian martyrs who suffered at Christian hands were alike Spaniards ; and gentle and long-suffering as the Spaniards are in the practical affairs of everyday life, the course of the ages has not abated this fervour of conviction in matters of the highest import. It is a feature of the Spanish character which stands in the way of any easy optimism concerning the immediate future of Spain.

The conflict of extreme views in Spain is emphasised by the existence of slight racial differences among the population of the country, and more especially by the existence of Catalonia and its great capital. Barcelona is the richest city in Spain, the most energetic, now perhaps the largest. Madrid is the official and administrative capital, but Barcelona is the brain and the arm of Spain ; it is the one city which possesses initiative and the executive energy to carry out its ideas. In the rest of Spain it is difficult not to believe that every Spaniard one meets is either a Don Quixote or a Sancho Panza, or some combination or variation of those great types. Everywhere one sees grave, long, dreamy, handsome faces, or rotund, wrinkled, humorous, good-natured faces—the faces of those who are altogether inapt for practical life and the faces of those who have spent themselves in meeting its petty details, both alike unfitted for the task of truly organising the world around them. It is remarkable that one seldom hears the voice of indignation in Spain. The conventional accounts of the

Spanish character tell us, indeed, that the Spaniard is quickly moved to anger and readily uses the knife. No doubt, to avenge real or fancied wrongs he uses the knife, but he is not inclined to expend his anger in stimulating himself or others to right wrongs; if his emotions easily found that vent probably he would use the knife less. In the course of my last visit to Spain, during six weeks I never heard the voice of indignation nor saw signs of impatience, save only twice: once I came across a French commercial traveller who became a volcano of more or less serious indignation, expressed in bad Spanish, in face of the inconveniences of Spanish travelling, and once more, I found an eminent publicist, again French, in the room next to mine at an hotel in Seville—where he had settled himself in order to study and write about the manners and customs of Andalusia—grow impatient when repeated requests for morning coffee failed to produce a luxury which in purely Spanish hotels the guest is usually supposed to seek at a café. But as soon as I had passed the borders of Catalonia I came upon a foreman expostulating vigorously with his gang of navvies, and it seemed a new and strange circumstance, something that I had not seen for a very long time. The Catalans are not usually handsome and are of very mixed type, but they are clear-eyed, vigorous, independent, of coarser fibre indeed, and less fine perceptions than the true Spaniard, and better adapted to make their way in the practical modern world.

We may realise something of the difference between the Catalan and the Spaniard by merely observing the difference in their water-pots—not a minor matter in a land where water and the carrying of water play so conspicuous a part. The water-pots differ slightly in every province of Spain; in Valencia, which borders on Catalonia and is inhabited by a race of artists, the pitcher in common use is a very beautiful and uncoloured variety of the ancient classic double-handled amphora; it is the most graceful of all the Spanish water-pots, a delightful survival of Greek antiquity, though not specially adapted to practical modern needs. But as soon as we pass into the land of the Catalans and reach Tarragona we find quite a different water-pot, with a large spout for the water to

enter, and a small spout for it to be poured out, as well as a handle across the top, by which it may be carried as a basket is carried. It is a thoroughly practical but not specially beautiful pitcher, and at Tarragona they seek to give it a touch of beauty by a wash of green glaze over the upper third. When at last we reach Barcelona even this touch of colour has gone, and a coat of greasy-looking greyish-black, doubtless a useful tint, but certainly unpleasant, is uniformly laid over the water-pots. Even this detail of daily life reveals the Catalan.*

Whatever the defects of their qualities may be, the Catalans are able both to think and to act. Every progressive movement, either in ideas or in practice, finds its centre in Barcelona, and it is in Barcelona that the cry of "Electra" has its chief focus of propaganda. Barcelona, moreover, is not only a centre alike of commerce and ideas; the Catalans possess an instinct of political freedom, and are in a state of constant friction with Madrid, the maladministration of officials perpetually leading to difficulties which the central Government can only settle by the easy method of resorting to force. The rooted love of the Catalan for self-government, and his feeling that Spain is a land outside Catalonia, have, indeed, lately reached an unprecedented pitch, and the cry of "Down with Spain!" which was heard in the streets of Barcelona during the disorders accompanying the recent prolonged tramway strike, produced a certain amount of consternation in Spain. General Weyler, the Minister of War, who once governed in Barcelona, is credited with a desire for the reform of the administration of Catalonia. But in the meanwhile (at the moment that I chanced to reach the city in May last), and directly after a

* The same tendency may be noted in the native language of the Catalans, which they carefully cherish. It is closely related to Provençal; but while Provençal is one of the most charming and musical of tongues, the Catalans have, so far as possible, contracted their language into a series of unpleasantly sibilant and dental monosyllables which might have been invented by a people whose mouths were habitually full. At the same time I do not wish to assert that the Catalans are without art-instincts; though they have produced few great painters, the finest and most genuinely national architecture in Spain belongs to this region. Barcelona and its people drew from Cervantes an oft-quoted eulogy, and at the present day few cities in Spain are pleasanter to live in.

series of sanguinary collisions in the streets, a "state of war" was officially declared, the military authorities took over the control of affairs, troops were poured in and posted at every "strategic position," the newspapers were placed under military censure and forbidden to publish any news concerning the events in progress, and at last the trams began to run again down the long Rambla, under the guard of mounted soldiers with drawn sabres, while crowds gazed in silence. Peace once more reigned in Barcelona. But it was easy enough to see that a peace thus attained was worth little. A free, prosperous, and independent people cannot permanently be coerced by the cheap method of resorting to force, and it is likely enough that the cry of "Down with Spain!" has only been stifled for the present to arise more loudly than ever when a fitting season occurs.

The independent and progressive spirit of Catalonia, with its marked tendency to anarchism—which everywhere finds more adherents in Spain than socialism—is an element of danger for the future of the country, because it is doubtful how far Spain can be brought into line with Catalonia. When we enter Spain by Barcelona we are struck by its Spanish character, but when we enter elsewhere and leave by Barcelona we realise how unlike it is to Spain, in race and in traditions, and that these alert, business-like, rather coarse-fibred people are different from the true Spaniards. It is possible to imagine the present situation if we suppose Ulster governed from Dublin by a Cabinet in which Mr. Redmond or Mr. Dillon was Prime Minister. We should have the same conflict of instincts and methods between the progressive, commercial spirit of Belfast and the Celtic, conservative spirit of Ireland. Such a situation is by no means necessarily dangerous, but it is difficult. We can but hope that on the one hand Catalonia will have full freedom of development, and that on the other hand its development will not destroy all that is beautiful and characteristic in the rest of Spain.

No doubt Spain, like Italy, will have her revival. The fundamental vitality of the people and the great natural wealth of their land, the rapid growth of the population, the spread of

new and progressive ideas, of which *Electra* is so significant a sign, all point to such a revival. Even the war with the United States has had a healthy and stimulating influence, and has been met by Spaniards with their ancient and customary fortitude. The more thoughtful regard the loss of the colonies as a necessary though unpleasant surgical operation; all resentment seems to have died out; the newspapers chronicle the difficulties of the Americans in the Philippines without acrimony and without glee; they are even able to make their loss the point of a jest, and a comic paper lately represented a Spaniard pensively remarking to himself: "If we could only lose our monks as easily as our colonies!" Such a revival is doubtless inevitable, and those of us who have learnt to love Spain because she takes us so far away from the ugliness and unrest of "progress," can but hope that the profoundly conservative instincts of the people will guide them aright in choosing the good and refusing the evil of modern civilisation.

HAVELOCK ELLIS.

THE DOCTOR'S STORY

HE told me the tale one winter's night as we sat by his study fire and grew confidential over a glass of port. A shaded lamp threw a subdued glow over the room, a blazing log crackled in the grate. Without, a heavy wind swept up the quiet suburban street in heavy gusts, shaking the heavily curtained windows with a persistent fury.

For some moments past we had been silent ; then the Doctor leaned back in his chair and sighed. My gaze dropped from its contemplation of ascending rings of smoke and rested on his face. I had imagined a sigh of content, but I saw that his brow was creased. In response to my uplifted eyebrows, he smiled constrainedly.

"It is the wind," he said at last. "I have a settled and deep-rooted aversion to the howling of the wind at night."

"I am inclined to like it," I answered lazily. "One's comfort seems to shine by contrast."

"A selfish view," he remarked. "Though, to confess the truth, my aversion is not inspired by any feeling of philanthropy. It has to do merely with a—reminiscence."

The Doctor sipped his wine and relapsed into a moody silence

"A past episode ?" I remarked, five minutes later.

He nodded.

"And it occurred ?"

"Five years ago."

I laughed. "My dear fellow, that regretful tone and this persistent memory force me to a conclusion." My eyes rose to the curling rings. "There was a woman in it."

He spoke slowly. "There were two women in it."

I was guilty of a laugh.

"One I have forgotten," he continued dreamily, "although she was the principal person concerned."

"Enigmas !" I commented.

"The other"—he paused a moment—"the other, Hartly, was not a woman."

"An angel! Ah! that settles it. You *were* in love with her."

For a moment he was silent. Then he spoke strangely:

"Yes—I was in love with her."

I looked at him curiously. He was looking at the fire.

"Man is not naturally a secretive animal," he remarked presently. "If he keep a secret locked in his breast it is by a system of battling with a continual desire to share it with another. Some day"—he paused and looked at me—"some day he will unlock the door."

An effort after laughter expired. I was impressed, in spite of myself, by the earnestness of his manner.

"Call it, if you like, the influence of the wind," he continued. "The desire is on me now to speak."

I threw away my cigar-end. He leaned over the fire.

"Five years ago," he began, "I fell in love with a shadow, a celestially beautiful—unreality."

"My dear fellow," I remarked cynically, "we all do."

He turned his eyes upon me. "I am not speaking figuratively."

I looked at the Doctor. It seemed to me that his clear grey eyes looked less clear than usual, that his resolute features hinted at internal emotion.

"Pass me a cigar," I said quietly, "and trot out the yarn."

But the Doctor sat motionless. I got the cigar myself. He leaned further over the fire and spoke.

"I was a young country practitioner at the time. Not so young but that my name had already begun to make some little stir in the medical world. I mention that merely to account for the fact that Sir Hugh Trelawney should have come to know of my existence. In common with every one for miles around, I was well acquainted with him. By hearsay only, I should add. You see, he was an influence in the neighbourhood: a social influence. I retain even now a vivid recollection of the grey old turrets of his country seat, just visible through a thick skirting of trees. There was a solidity

about the place. Its antiquity was, as the saying goes, the real thing. His family dated its existence as far back as—but there! I spare you detail. He was an aristocrat, and he looked it.”

The Doctor was silent a moment. I stared at my cigar-end and waited.

“Sir Hugh was young,” he continued. “So was his wife. Rumour spoke of her as beautiful. For once rumour was correct. She was one of the most beautiful women I have ever seen.”

I took out my cigar, and whistled softly.

The Doctor looked up from the fire.

“She was the woman I have forgotten,” he said.

“You relieve me,” I answered.

The Doctor continued:

“A chaos separated us socially. I had never seen her. It is possible I never should have seen her otherwise than professionally. But one evening, as I sat over the remains of my dinner, a messenger knocked at my door. Lady Trelawney was ill. It was a boisterous night, Hartly—a night like this. The wind swept in furious gusts as I opened the door and peered out into the night. I flung a regretful look at my cosy fire. But a doctor's life is one of self-sacrifice. I swung into my overcoat. Sir Hugh's dog-cart waited without. A moment later we were on our way. I felt no disposition for words, and the messenger was equally silent. The pony stumbled along the dark roads, shying now and again at unfamiliar objects. The messenger swore under his breath. I bent my head and buffeted the wind. I was glad when at last we reached a curve in the long drive and found ourselves before the old house. It was a blaze of light. My ear caught the clash of an orchestra; figures of brilliantly dressed women, black-coated men, crossed and recrossed the windows. I jumped to the ground and made my way to the hall door. But I had no time to knock. My arrival was expected. The huge door was flung open. I received a hazy impression of a gorgeous interior, dark oak panellings, heavy curtains, coats of armour, powdered footmen—then I found my hand grasped and wrung. A tall, clean-

shaven man in evening-dress stood before me. I recognised Sir Hugh.

"'I'm so glad you've come, Doctor,' he said at once. 'Your name is very familiar to me. I'm pleased to make your acquaintance. I only wish it had been in some other way.'

"A footman took my coat.

"'Is it a sudden indisposition?' I asked.

"'Yes. I should call it sudden,' he answered. 'She—my wife, you know—complained of faintness. That was at dinner. After, I persuaded her to retire. I got anxious about her. You see, she's very delicate.'

"I nodded.

"There was a clash of billiard-balls and a sudden burst of laughter from a room near, while through half-opened curtains opposite I caught glimpses of endless couples sweeping by in the mazes of the valse.

"'It may be nothing serious,' I remarked reassuringly.

"'I judged it better to send for you,' he replied.

"'I had better go to her at once.'

"'If you would be kind enough, Doctor.'

"I followed him up the wide staircase and across the spacious landing. Outside one of the doors he paused.

"'If necessary, I can wire for Dr. Morton. He usually sees my wife.'

"'I shall know,' I answered, 'if it is necessary.'

"He nodded and opened the door for me.

"When I left Lady Trelawney's room I found Sir Hugh pacing the landing. He met me with raised eyebrows and an inquiring smile. But the smile died as he met my eyes.

"'You had better send for Dr. Morton,' I said quietly.

"He took the blow well, Hartly. His face altered a moment, that was all. One learns to appreciate the evidence of blue blood in an emergency. He did not even question me. He only muttered:

"'I must get rid of these people.'

"'I must insist on quiet,' I replied.

"'Morton can't come before the morning,' he said, biting his lips.

" 'I will stop all night,' I answered.

" He stared at me, his face very pale.

" 'The suddenness of it, Doctor——'

" 'It's in the nature of the attack,' I answered.

" He gripped my arm. 'There is no danger?'

" 'Symptoms will develop,' I answered.

" I could have said more. I was sorry for him, Hartly; he was very fond of his wife.

" Sir Hugh preceded me across the landing and flung open a door.

" 'I must leave you alone for awhile, Doctor,' he said, 'while I go and disperse my guests. You will find books and papers.'

" I nodded. He closed the door. I was left alone.

" I found myself in a long, low-roofed room. There were alcoves in it and irregular corners; bay-windows heavily curtained. The floor was of polished wood, the walls were lined with carved oak wainscoting. They held panels, I remember, and each panel was a family portrait. The room I supposed to be the library of the old house. Book-shelves lined the walls; old, ponderous, solid, like the portraits that kept them company.

" There was a strangely depressing air about the place, which communicated itself to me. It seemed heavy with the memories of dead and forgotten secrets.

" I strove to shake off the feeling of strangeness. A fire crackled cheerfully in the grate and a leather arm-chair stood before it. I selected a book and drew the chair up to the fire. I tried to read awhile, and then desisted. My mind persistently wandered. My thoughts strayed in all sorts of unaccustomed places.

" The noise downstairs had ceased. I heard a sound of footsteps, the rustle of skirts, whispered voices, the shutting of doors. Then, without, the grating of wheels on the carriage-drive. The guests were departing.

" Then a dead silence fell over the house. There was not a sound, not a stir. I strained my ears for Sir Hugh's footsteps. But he did not come. I afterwards found that he was with his wife.

"I looked at my watch. It was past midnight. In an hour's time I would visit my patient.

"In the intense stillness I became more vividly conscious of the boisterous energy of the wind. It was like an accompaniment, at that moment a prelude, to an enacted drama. Memories linger in music, and there is music in the wind. That is why this night has brought the incident so vividly to my mind."

The Doctor paused a moment and refilled his glass. I noticed that his hand was not so steady as usual.

"I have said that I was listening to the wind," he continued; "that is why my first consciousness of any presence other than my own was just a faint rustle. It seemed part of the wind. Then in a sudden hush it grew distinctive. It was the rustle of a woman's dress over the floor.

"I turned round in my chair. The next moment I was on my feet. I could only stare and stare. Hardly, it was a woman; but her face. It was celestially beautiful; haunting, yearning, colourless, dreamy, sad.

"I leaned forward. She drew nearer, till she stood directly in the glare of the lamplight. Then I started violently; the commonplace that had risen late to my lips, died. I saw that she was dressed in the strange, stiff costume of the fourteenth century.

"For a moment I stood paralysed with something like fear; but my imagination was not at that time very active. I soon conceived of a solution. There had been private theatricals; one of the guests was stopping in the house; she had come into the library in search of something.

"I did not speak, and she seemed unconscious of my presence. She moved in a leisurely fashion up and down the room, and her long, quaint train rustled after her. Once or twice she stopped still and sighed faintly.

"I began to feel an awkwardness in the silence. She had never once looked at me. I coughed, first softly, then more loudly. But she did not appear to have heard. She continued her restless walk. Once she passed so near to me that her train swept over the toe of my boot. At that she turned and looked at me. Our eyes met, and I felt myself tingling from

head to foot with the strangest sensation I have ever felt. I don't know how long we remained like that. I completely lost all sense of my surroundings. I felt myself transported into a world of strange emotions."

"A poetical way of confessing that you fell in love," I remarked.

But the Doctor did not heed me. He was saying:

"Then her eyes seemed to lose all sense of my reality. They held no expression. It was as if I had intruded into the line of her vision, as if she were trying to look beyond me. She moved with a quick step towards the door. I shook myself together and sprang across to open it. As she passed she turned her head and looked at me. I remained fixed to the threshold, watching the curl of her strange, stiff train as she passed into the darkness of a dimly lit corridor.

"I turned back into the room. Its emptiness struck me like a blow. It was unearthly beauty that I had seen, Hartly; spiritual excellence; everything that is divine. But there! I bore you. It is the passion that has wrecked my life. I cannot forget her. I can never forget her."

"Love at first sight," I commented. "I have been apt to disbelieve in it."

"When the soul looks forth from a woman's eyes," said the Doctor.

"My dear fellow!" I protested.

He laughed drily. "I agree with you. In the ordinary way the soul does not look forth from a woman's eyes."

"In love," I remarked, "every man imagines exceptions."

"I am imagining nothing," said the Doctor.

My answer was unsympathetic. "I presume you stopped for the private theatricals?"

But the Doctor did not hear me. He was leaning over the fire.

"The next day," he continued, "Dr. Morton arrived. I was glad of his presence. He was kind enough to say that he was glad of mine. For two days we fought with death for the delicate frame of Lady Margaret Trelawney. Then—one smiles at the fatuousness of human judgments—we pronounced all danger over.

"Sir Hugh begged us to stop and dine and celebrate his wife's recovery by helping him with a bottle of his vintage.

"I accepted with alacrity. There was but one thought in my mind: an overwhelming desire to know more about the strange lady I had seen in the library.

"It was over our cigars and coffee that I approached the subject. Sir Hugh had been entertaining us with humorous anecdotes. Dr. Morton proved himself appreciative, but I imagine I was *distrail*. My mind was restless.

"I was glad when the conversation veered towards Lady Trelawney's illness, and gave me an opportunity to speak.

"I suppose, Sir Hugh,' I said, addressing my host, 'that on Lady Trelawney's recovery you will—er—resume your interrupted entertainment?'

"He looked at me, I thought, in surprise.

"Of course, we shall give others,' he answered. 'We are forced to entertain largely, contrary, at times, to our inclination.'

"I meant to particularise,' I answered. 'You must forgive my insistence. I am very partial to private theatricals.'

"Private theatricals!' he echoed.

"I suppose it was Shakespeare,' I continued. 'There is nothing like ambition, even in private theatricals.'

"My dear Doctor!' protested Sir Hugh.

"Then it wasn't Shakespeare,' I said with a laugh. 'That was a premature guess. I thought it would account for the strangeness of the costume.'

"Sir Hugh glanced at Doctor Morton. They both laughed.

"I noticed your extraordinary abstemiousness, Doctor,' said Sir Hugh, 'otherwise I should be tempted to blame the wine. May I ask to what you refer?'

"I was speaking of your theatricals,' I said impatiently.

"He leaned his elbows on the table and smiled at me.

"There were no theatricals, Doctor.'

"I grew impatient.

"Then the masque, or tableaux, or whatever it was.'

"His smile broadened. 'There was no masque or tableaux.'

He leaned to Morton and asked laughingly: 'What would you call this attack?'

"I dropped my cigar and gripped the table.

"Then, in the name of Heaven, who was she?'

"Who was who?' It was Morton who spoke. I looked and saw that his face was serious.

"That lady,' I answered: 'that magnificent woman in the strange costume.'

"Sir Hugh flicked the ash off his cigar and laughed. 'There were several pretty women present,' he said,—'and—yes—I agree with you, the present-day evening toilettes do strike a mere man as a trifle strange.'

"It was not a present-day costume,' I said slowly.

"It was as if I had launched a thunderbolt. Morton leaned on the table. Sir Hugh dropped his cigar.

"Neither was it a hallucination,' I continued.

"The thunderbolt had recoiled on myself. I began to feel an odd sensation of coming disaster.

"Sir Hugh gripped my arm.

"Speak plainly, Doctor,' he said.

"I recounted, slowly, my adventure of the first evening. As I spoke, my eyes were on Sir Hugh's face. I saw the colour fade from his cheeks. He sank back limply in his chair. Morton rose and bent over him.

"He has fainted,' he said quietly.

"Good God!' I cried, 'what does it mean?' I was too thunderstruck to assist him.

"Morton went over to the sideboard and poured out some brandy.

"It means,' he answered slowly, 'that my common sense has received a shock.'

"I sank back in my chair. I could only stare at him.

"Which is a tradition in the Trelawney family,' he pursued, loosening Sir Hugh's collar, 'that when any member is about to die their death is foreshadowed by the appearance of an apparition—'

"I felt myself turn pale. Morton poured out some brandy and put it into my hand.

"The tradition further says,' he continued, looking at me curiously, 'that the apparition is of extraordinary beauty.'

"I found my voice. 'We have no adjective to describe her. She was—she was—' I broke off.

"That proves the correctness of the other part of the story,' added Morton, with his customary coolness. 'It is said that the spirit leaves an indelible impression—possesses a kind of haunting influence over the life of the person unlucky, or should I say lucky, enough to have encountered it.' He bent over Sir Hugh. 'Dear me! this is an obstinate fainting-fit.'

"But I did not answer him, Hartly. A woman's eyes haunted me. I buried my face in my hands."

The Doctor paused. For a long time he did not speak. He seemed to have become unconscious of my presence.

I broke the silence. "And you really saw the thing?" I asked, with interest.

The Doctor raised his head. "The man fainted," he said, looking at me.

"And the woman?" I asked.

"The woman died."

There was another long silence. I stared at the Doctor. The Doctor stared at the fire.

"And do you seriously mean to tell me," I said, drawing a deep breath, "that you are in love with a shadow, an unreality, a non-existent thing?"

The Doctor roused himself. His face had lost its dreamy look. He had become once more the dry, cynical, uncommunicative man whose love of solitude was a by-word among his friends.

"In love?" he echoed. "Who said I was in love?"

"You forget your preface," I remarked.

He rose and lounged to the sideboard. I heard the clink of a decanter. Then another short laugh.

"Suppose I was to tell you," he said drily, "that the whole thing was a yarn—that I read it in a magazine somewhere?"

I flung away my cigar-end, and crossed my arms.

"Supposing I was to answer that I didn't believe in the magazine?"

There was no answer. I heard the door slam and the Doctor's heavy step as he ascended the stairs. I got into my overcoat and left the house.

For many weeks I did not see the Doctor. My studies engrossed my attention, and the Doctor's strange, retired life accounted for the fact that I failed to meet him at the houses of our common friends. The impression his strange story had made upon my mind had gradually faded into a dim memory. An occurrence brought it back to the realms of reality.

I was standing one evening in Piccadilly Circus waiting for a 'bus. There was the usual crowd of people, and the crush was great. All at once I felt myself violently jostled. I turned round angrily. A man, evidently in a great hurry, turned to apologise. He lifted his hat. I recognised my friend—the Doctor. His face was pale, he seemed in a state of extraordinary excitement.

"Hello!" I said. "What's up?"

For a moment he stared as if he did not know me. Then my face dawned upon his recognition.

He gripped my arm.

"Congratulate me, Hartly," he said excitedly.

"What for?" I asked. "Going to be married, at last?"

"I am going to see her again," he said in my ear. "I am going to reap the reward of seven years' fidelity to her memory. She is coming out of nothingness to pass before my eyes—this very night, perhaps."

I looked at the Doctor's excited features, and the memory of the night when he had told me a certain story rose vividly to my mind. I gave vent to a prolonged whistle.

"My dear fellow," I said, sympathetically, "go home and go to bed."

"She is coming, I tell you," he repeated excitedly. "She may be there now, at this very moment, standing by the fire in the old library. There is no such thing as chance," he continued, his eye roving over the Circus in search of a cab. "It was fate. I was at my club. I happened to take up an evening paper, and there I saw, in a small paragraph, an announcement.

It was premature. I had not dared to hope for it." He turned his haggard eyes upon me. "Pity me, Hartly; for years I have longed for the death of a fellow creature."

"My dear fellow——" I began again.

He interrupted me. "There's a hansom! Must catch the 8.30. Good-bye, Hartly. You see before you a happy man. Good-bye."

He waved his hand and sought to pierce the crowd. I caught him by the coat.

"One moment——" I began.

He broke from me impatiently. "Read that," he said.

He thrust a newspaper into my hand.

The crowd severed us. I watched him jump into a hansom and drive away.

For a moment I stood staring after the retreating cab. But reverie is incompatible with a moving crowd.

I entered an Aërated Bread Company, and sat down at a table. I opened the newspaper and looked through it carefully.

In a small paragraph at the end of the page I read the following :

We regret to announce that no hope is entertained of the recovery of Sir Hugh Trelawny, who lies at his country-seat dangerously ill.

I read no more. I put down the paper and stared in front of me. My surroundings faded, the clatter of tea-cups fell on unheeding ears. Before my eyes rose a vision of the Doctor standing by the old library fire, waiting, waiting for——

I pulled myself together. "Am I awake?" I muttered.

Then I became conscious that the man opposite had lowered his paper.

"The question is, sir," he said, catching my eye, "are the British Generals awake? I consider it the strangest thing in the world that with the command of such valour, such endurance——"

"Exactly!" I interrupted quietly. Then I broke the top off my egg, and added: "but, believe me, my dear sir, there are stranger things in the world even than a British reverse."

LENA M. EASSIE.

SONG OF VAIN SINGING

VOID of delight as Dead Sea apples are
The foolish songs we sing for trivial gain
Of minted treasure or of laurels vain;
But let me win unto some region far,

Where I may find the thin white petals strewn
In one old forest Aprils long ago;
Where I may walk amid the level snow
Of blossoms vanished from the light of June;

And through the stillness of low vaulted rooms,
May reach the place, unseen of mortal eyes,
In which secure the Well Belovéd lies:
Then would the nightingale of odorous glooms

The rapture of his voice repress, the while
I sang unto that sleeping One most dear
A song whose joy ineffable to hear
Back to the earth would our old gods beguile.

GERTRUDE BARTLETT.

“UNTIL SEVENTY TIMES SEVEN”

“Love that is dead and buried, yesterday
Out of his grave rose up before my face . . .”

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

“***B**UT when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell upon his neck and kissed him.”*

The shrill treble of a childish voice rose clear and distinct on the pine-scented air. Out of the open windows of the little wayside schoolhouse an imprisoned butterfly, brilliant with colour, floated triumphantly away into the sunshine, sadly distracting the tiny reader and a score of unwilling listeners, longing eagerly for the striking of the church clock, when they might follow the Red Admiral's example, and forget all that they had learnt as fast as possible!

Outside, in the lonely path which ran down through the wood to the village in the hollow, a man and woman stood confronting each other in an oppressive silence. At last the man moved restlessly as if to go, and then paused again, saying with a laugh that was full of bitterness:

“How pleasant it sounds—that old story! What a pity it isn't true nowadays! But, after all, the old patriarch was a credulous sort of person, with no proper pride. And the prodigal had the great merit of being picturesque in his rags and dirt. A ne'er-do-weel in a decent coat, with boots on his feet, couldn't expect to be believed—especially by a woman!”

The girl at his side turned her great troubled grey eyes upon him as she said, in a low voice which quivered with the passion she strove so hard to keep in check:

“You forget. He had only squandered his father's substance, and you—you have wasted and trampled in the dust our hearts' best love!”

Again the other moved, grating his feet on the sandy soil as he answered in a hopeless, monotonous sort of way:

"Do I need you to tell me that, Alethea? Isn't it enough to have come to a desolate home—isn't it enough to have stood yonder by my mother's grave—the only person, I verily believe, that ever really cared for me—isn't it enough to see the scorn in your eyes—need you put it into words? If blood could wash out the past do you think I would grudge it? What more can I do—have I not humbled myself in the dust to entreat your forgiveness—and is it any use?"

The girl wrung her hands together piteously. They were moving very slowly down the path towards the stream, which was running over its shining stones and laughing up in their faces as if there were no such evils as anger and misery in the world.

"Why will you say these things?" she asked. "Have I not told you I do forgive you? You don't know what you have done to me. You have spoilt my life—you have killed my trust not only in you, but in everything and every one else. Your mother was far happier than I, although you broke her heart, for she died loving you still—and I, I shall never love any one any more. How can you ask me to begin all over again? Can one forget at will?"

"For the very hardest thing on the face of God's earth commend me to a really good woman!" he cried, and then relapsed into moody silence.

So the twain went on together, each busy with their own miserable thoughts.

Before Alethea's eyes a shadowy, visionary figure flitted: a girl in a white gown, with radiant face and joyous movements. It woke up a strange yearning pity in her—this happy, trustful, careless creature, living in a fool's paradise; but she was dead, long ago, and the man at her side had killed her. And now he expected miracles—that the dead should come to life.

After all it was a commonplace story enough. Five years ago Valentine Rendall had bartered honour and faith, had broken his word, and involved himself in a tangle of pecuniary difficulties for the sake of a woman, who, when his troubles

thickened around him, laughed scornfully in his face and told him she had never meant anything. Life was dull and he had amused her; but it was midsummer madness on his part to have thought she would ever become a poor man's wife. Some one had offered her a position which was more to her mind; and as for him, he had better go back and make his peace, if he could, with the pretty Puritan, who might yet have spirit enough to send him about his business!

Then the card house came tumbling all about his ears. In a desperate moment, tempted at the thought of the wealth which would be a passport to the favour of his enchantress, Rendall had speculated with some money that was left in his hands in the course of business, failed, and then in a frenzy of despair fled the country.

That way lay ruin. Had he stayed to face it out something might have been retrieved, and Alethea at least might have stood by him; but that cowardly flight, more perhaps than the wrong done to herself, signed his condemnation with the girl whose pride and unworldliness and vehement sense of honour made her absolutely incapable of finding any excuse. To her it was impossible to conceive of any fascination that should have caused her to swerve even a hair's-breadth from her allegiance to him; equally impossible to understand the wild panic, the reckless misery which prompted him to cut the Gordian knot, or rather to slip through the noose and leave it for others to unravel as best they might.

There had been no public exposure. The man whose money had been so freely "borrowed" was an old friend, with a kinder heart than that of youth. He wrote to the forlorn culprit, bidding him come back, and take his own time to pay the debt: "For I will not believe your father's son is really a traitor, and your poor mother is wearying for news of you."

For a moment or two Rendall wavered, trying to nerve himself to return and pick up the burden of his disgrace, which, although it was known only to three, it seemed to him would stare at him from the face of every passer-by. While he hesitated, a little packet directed in Alethea's writing was brought to him. He undid it with trembling fingers, and stood

looking blankly at the contents, a tiny box folded in a sheet of paper, and inside it the opal ring he had given to her when they were first engaged, and that was all: no word, no sign. And then, perhaps for the first time, he fully realised what his sin had meant. He went out into the dark night and hungered for all that he had lost.

Five slow years had passed since then; and now he had come home. Long ago the money had been paid back, long ago the mother who had wept such heavy tears over her boy had been comforted by the thought that soon, another year, another few months, and she would see his face again. But when he came death had been before him. A grassy mound starred with daisies, and the drifted petals of the frail monthly roses falling upon it, was all the welcome she could give him; and when he first looked into Alethea's face he knew that a chasm more wide than any grave yawned between them.

On this dreamy summer afternoon he had compelled an interview. He felt himself old and haggard and worn by the side of this beautiful woman, whom the years, that had aged him, had only matured and perfected. She had been so young that the image he had always carried with him paled before the splendour of her actual loveliness, but though he had stifled his own pride and humbled himself to passionate entreaty, he might as well have pleaded with a marble statue. It was not so much that she would not, as that she could not thaw the frozen tide that had once flowed so warm and strong for him.

There are those who go maimed and wounded all their lives because some rough hand has brought them face to face with the hollowness of things before they are strong enough to bear the sight, or wise enough to trace the Hand that orders all in the midst of the darkest chaos. The more highly strung the nature, the more given to idealise those it loves, the more likely is it that the hurt will go deep and fester instead of healing.

They passed over the shaky rustic bridge, and already the twinkling red roofs of the village began to show through the trees; very soon they would be back in the straggling street,

thickened around him, laughed scornfully in his face and told him she had never meant anything. Life was dull and he had amused her; but it was midsummer madness on his part to have thought she would ever become a poor man's wife. Some one had offered her a position which was more to her mind; and as for him, he had better go back and make his peace, if he could, with the pretty Puritan, who might yet have spirit enough to send him about his business!

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at the gate of the old Manor house where Alethea dwelt alone, and the moment would be gone by for ever.

Rendall made one more effort. He turned sharply round, and taking the girl's two hands, in spite of her resistance, between his own brown, toil-hardened ones, he said more gently :

"Listen! Three months ago when I was lying in hospital, and the doctors thought me dying, you came to me in a dream, and when I asked you if you forgave me you said, 'What are words where one loves?' It was only a sick man's dream, but it made me wildly happy. Tell me, if you thought I was really dying, would you come to me then?"

She looked away. Strange, tumultuous, unexplained longings surged through her mind.

Her companion's grip insensibly tightened. "Will you look me in the face and say you would not come?" he asked harshly.

The troubled eyes wavered before his intent look :

"I cannot tell. If you were dying, it would be the end—perhaps—I cannot tell!"

He flung her hands away with a despairing gesture.

"And if I were dead," he answered, "what then? You seem to have forgotten I should be somewhere. Are you going to hate me through the long years of Eternity, too?"

But it was his turn to start as she cried out with a sob of irrepressible anguish :

"Will you never understand, is it not enough that you have spoilt this world for me—you have clouded my Heaven also, for I can't, oh I can't forgive!"

Rendall stood as if petrified. All his anger died down. There was nothing more to say or to do, this was indeed the end. Mechanically he made way for her to pass. "God forgive me," he said brokenly, "I did not know it was as bad as that. May He give you a heart of flesh again, not for mine, but for your own sake. I pray that you may be able to forget me, and then perhaps your life will not be quite so hard."

He struck sharply across through the tangle of bushes and bracken, and was gone. His companion staggered, and suddenly

all her strength failed her. She sat down on a fallen tree-trunk and shook from head to foot. For a little while she was simply dazed and stupefied by the conflict that had been raging, and then a chill knowledge came creeping like some baleful mist through her mind, that the past was at length quite irrevocable. All unrecognised, hidden deep out of sight, overlaid with bitterness and grief, there had always lingered a frail plant of hope. A dim, unregarded certainty that in some unimaginable future—perhaps when he or she were dying, as he had said—their two lives might cross and meet again. The visionary hour had come, but it wore a different face from that which she had pictured, it demanded more than her pride and stoicism would give. Once she had been weak enough, she told herself, flinging her treasure into an empty void. To-day she had been strong, and the opportunity had passed her by and left her in safety, but the heart in her breast ached and ached, and cried out that she had been false and cruel to him, and to all that was truest and best in her own nature.

Now it was too late. "Too late! too late!" murmured the hurrying river. "Too late! too late!" piped the mocking blackbird, "the nest is torn down, and the spring for you will have no meaning, for this time he has gone away for ever!"

And through it all, amid the misery and confusion of her brain, she kept hearing, as in some haunting nightmare, a child's voice repeating over and over again with ruthless insistence, "*But when he was a great way off*"—till she put her hands over her ears, as if she could shut out the sound by main force!

Presently the words seemed to take a new meaning. Was it not she who was "a great way off"? Was there any chance that he in his turn would "have compassion" and receive her?

Almost against her will she found herself flying down the narrow foot-track. The brambles tried spitefully to detain her, and tore her dress and her impatient hands, as she fought her way through them. The long trailing ropes of ivy caught her feet and made her stumble, and the path stretched on and on interminably, till it seemed almost hopeless to dream of overtaking him—and even if she did, what then?

Her colour came and went, her heart beat so fast that she could scarcely breathe, but still she hurried blindly on, and then all of a sudden she stood quite still. Not a yard away from her a man was leaning over a low stone wall, his head was buried on his folded arms, and though the dry branches crackled beneath her tread, he did not move or seem to hear.

She tried to speak, but her voice would not obey her, and only a low sobbing cry escaped her. At the sound he stirred, swung himself round, and gazed with an agonised intentness into her face; then he moved a pace or two forward, and silently stretched out his arms.

In vain she tried to speak from that safe refuge: he laid a tender hand upon her lips. He was willing to kiss the very hem of her garment, but never should she humble herself to him!

"What are words where one loves?" sang the thrushes, and over their heads in the faint ethereal blueness rose the star of a new hope.

CHRISTIAN BURKE.

ALFRED AND OLIVER

OR THE ALPHA AND OMEGA OF ENGLISH HISTORY

CROMWELL Lodge, in Puritan Parish, is not perhaps the most sumptuous residence in Immortal City, but it has (as Philip Sidney says) a certain "firm stateliness" in its appointments. Its garden plot (for each mansion has a piece reclaimed from the Elysian meadows for privacy's sake) has a pretty taste about it. Oliver's favourite seat, of Marston Moor pattern, is set under one of Milton's mulberry-trees, and, thanks to a special dispensation from the Infernal County Council, wicket-gates, which are seldom latched, gives easy access to Hampden Lodge on the one side and Milton Lodge on the other. The ex-Protector still likes to have about him "those brazen statues of Venus and Cleopatra, and marble ones of Adonis and Apollo," on account of which dear Mrs. Mary Netherway wrote him a letter asking God "for His marsy to your pore soul." A jug of ale a few weeks ago (as we reckon time up here) had been brought out from the house, and Oliver was sitting at ease in his chair. He had just returned from a game of tennis with Charles the King in the Courts where political differences no longer arise; in the first game Charles had lost his head again, and Oliver had "run out," but in the next the old wrist-strain (due, so Æsculapius said, to excessive bauble-lifting) reasserted itself; and then the court-keeper, second son of Charon's younger sister, called "Time, gentlemen!" It was his duty to declare a drawn game wherever he could; besides, Socrates and Xenophon wanted the court for knucklebones.

England's uncrowned king had barely drained his tankard when he was aware of a visitor. Glancing towards the house he beheld Alfred, the great Saint-King of Wessex, moving over the lawn.

"An early pleasure!" cried Oliver; "I am to be in Saxon

Parish to-night, when I hoped to see you at Caedmon's, whither Milton is to take me to share their poets' pot-luck."

"Aye, I'll be there," Alfred replied, unbuckling his baldric and linking his arm in the other's. "But I called in, as I was passing homewards from the Orcus Pier."

"Been up river? I really ought to go myself; besides, I promised Elizabeth to take the children one day. They say Charon does it very well now that he has sold the steamers to a company."

"Yes, it makes an enjoyable trip, though it's very crowded on deck on the return journey. But I had an errand myself, which you'll like to hear of. It's partly why I called."

"Ho! Ho!" chuckled Oliver, winking with his smaller eyelid, "an excursion into upper air? Come, man, sit on the bench; I'm tired myself."

"It wasn't that, exactly," Alfred said; "but I had an appointment to keep. You see, there's an Alfred in England, even in these mixed modern days. He's a little fellow, 'Alfred the Less' Tennyson waggishly called him the other day. But he's been rather good to me—written some verse, for which he filched that pretty title some of my descendants gave me, 'England's Darling.' Well, he telephoned the other day, saying he was in Italy and would like to see me. Eadward—my boy—wanted to go for me; impersonate me, you know, and give the man a shaking for making him, in his play, woo and win his Edgiva when he was nine years old! A whimsical error! but some modern minor poets who were calling, said that the English people really hadn't noticed it; they didn't learn any history before 1066, when England ceased to be simply English!"

"But you've been yourself?"

"Yes. I kept him waiting a few days—we ought not to rush to these mortal interviewers. Yet, I wanted to be civil, for I've seen several notices in the 'Hades Argus' of the Commemoration they are to make of me in this year 1901."

"1901?" queried Oliver.

"Yes, my millenary—the 1000th anniversary of my passing hither. Ugh! It's nearly eight centuries since those Norman

rascals at Winchester made them move my bones in such a hurry from the New Minster to Hyde; they ache still with the jostling! Well, I went to see 'Alfred the Less,' and there he was, wrangling on Avernus Pier with old Charon himself, who wouldn't let him through the gate. He was cunning, for he'd brought a wreath with him—laurels were on his brows! But Charon would have it that they were sham *immortelles*—not the real thing. However, my appearance set all to rights; they recognised me, for I took my axe and Wedmore treaty with me. They know those, for some Teuton Count has made quite a decent statue of me holding them at Wantage. Dear old Wantage!" Alfred paused meditatively, for it was the place where he first drew the Berkshire air, and, with the Manor of Ethandune, his field of victory, had passed in his will to his faithful widow Ethelswitha. Alfred sighed, and Oliver's long clay burred in sympathy.

"What did he want?" quoth Oliver.

"Oh, just to get a message from me for England," so he said. He had been staying in Italy, and had run over in the afternoon from Veronica's Garden (I think he called the place) to Styx Harbour. "Very good travelling, nowadays," he said. "Yes," said I; "still *facilis descensus Avernus*." "Good!" said he, and put my retort in a note-book; "you still keep up your Virgil then, King Alfred? I know your happy quotations in the *Boethius*." "Ah! you are good," said I, "but, to tell the truth, Asser used to give me those, when he wrote up my *Handbook* for me. However, I know Vergil well now, you see; he belongs to our Bowling Club." The little man seemed awed at that.

"What else?" said Oliver, between two puffs.

"He gave me a good amount of news. It's really very kind of those folk up there over the river, Oliver; they take a lot of trouble in maintaining our fames. They don't overdo it, and they pretend not to be very interested until the time comes, and then they do it really well."

"What are they going to do for you, Alfred?"

"Why, name a new armed cruiser after me, and they had a notion of building a King Alfred Hall at Winchester, for

lectures and curiosities. Those Oxford folk ought to let them have my jewel with my name on it; and the British Museum should send father's ring and my sister's too. There's been a hitch about it, but they proposed to build it in my castle grounds at Wolvesey, where old Henry Blois, the Norman, put some of my stone-work as rubble into *his* walls, the thief!"

"Like Themistocles at Athens," observed Oliver, who was always glad to air his Milton-knowledge of antiquities.

"Oh, come!" cried Alfred, "don't call me a Persian, good friend! You know, you never *have* treated me well in the Winchester way!"

"Really, I never—" Oliver expostulated.

"Battered the cathedral there and robbed what was left of Hyde Abbey?" finished Alfred.

"On my honour, no!" and Oliver banged the table with an Ironside's fist. "It must have been that fellow Waller again. I'll speak to him about it."

"Well, well—it's no matter. And then they propose to flatter me in colossal bronze."

"In London? You did up the walls there, didn't you?"

"Well, it's to be at Winchester," said Alfred; "and, after all, she deserves it best. But I should like them to do something in dear old London—my idea would be a small image, under a canopy, with bronze reliefs on the sides of the pedestal supporting it."

"You ought to have been a sculptor, Alfred."

"Oh, I did a little myself in my day."

"As you did most things," replied Oliver, "though, I'm bound to add, you did all well."

"Thanks, friend, a handsome compliment, and from you," and Alfred picked up his charter and axe, and turned to leave.

"I almost forgot!" he cried. "They remembered you too, Oliver, the other day. At Huntingdon they celebrated you in the school-room, where old Dr. Beard, whom you afterwards made a J.P., once birched you, and a very able peer named Rosebery unveiled a big statue at Winchester, and made a really good speech about you. It's 300 years since *you* were born!"

"Bless my soul!" said Oliver, "so it is."

W.

A FLEET STREET TRAGEDY

THIS is the story of two sub-editors. It is quite true, and is worth the telling, but it would take much less of my time and yours, if you were likely to know what kind of creature, wild or tame, white or black, two- or four-footed, a sub-editor is. Perhaps I can give you, by way of introduction, some idea of this queer species in the natural history of Man.

You have all heard of editors, of course. They are beginning to "come out" a little, and to let the pure and wholesome light of the interviewer into their stuffy dens. When the editor is good to his party, and his city shows at the polls the due results of his careful sowing, he is knighted. He is, at all times, an object of superstitious reverence, as a mysterious being, hidden beneath a veil of black-and-white, sitting throned on power and armed with the thunderbolts of Jove.

The sub. is a different animal altogether. In a den at the back of the premises he sits, the weary Titan who forges the thunderer's bolts. There is hardly a more deeply responsible post than his, and surely no more vitally important work. That is why he is treated like a hack, paid like an "intelligent mechanic," overworked, and undervalued, ignored by the public, unappreciated by his fellow workmen, cursed by reporters, and despised by himself. It rests with him to put the face of truth or of falsehood upon the news of the world; to set events in their right proportion; to suppress the foul and promote the right, or, *vice versâ*, to rouse public opinion, and to advertise a cause or damn it. All this he can do, and does, insidiously, imperceptibly. Whilst the editorial guns are thundering, the sub-editorial engineers are at work, sapping bridges, mining, digging trenches, wreathing their kopjes with barbed wire, and serving out ammunition. If you will apply this figure of speech, and remember which of these forces Tommy Atkins has learnt to dread, you will see the moral of the metaphor.

Ransome and Smithers were the "subs." on the *Daily Mercury* at the time when it all happened. Harris had left on an indefinite holiday a couple of months before, being past work by reason of phthisis. The work was more than any two human beings could do; but Ransome and Smithers did it, for the simple reason that so long as their chum was "holidaying," and his chair remained vacant, he drew his salary or half-salary, whereas he would have lost both post and money if they had complained.

One night in the early spring the two men sat at opposite ends of a table buried in slips of "flimsy," evening papers, proofs, and copy. They worked in silence, now and then looking up to shout out an order to one of the lads in the next room, to snatch up a paper and scan it, or to consult a reference book or map. For the great war was on, and your "sub." was supposed to know every town and village in South Africa, every action of the campaign, every officer in the army, and every movement of troops, and its wherefore. The electric light swung over the heads of the workers, and once as he glanced up Smithers was startled to see how drawn and fretful his chum's face looked, as he irritably ran his "blue" across the copy he was preparing.

Ransome was summoned to the editor's room. He came back swearing savagely under his breath. Some alteration in the editorial page entirely disarranged his plan for his news-matter.

A minute's silence, and then the column-tape machine, standing in one corner with a long strip of paper dangling from its glass mouth, gave a whirr, and started type-writing a message. Its clack-clack-clack-clack rasped Ransome's nerves.

"Damn the thing!" he cried suddenly. Smithers smiled.

"Keep your hair on," he said coolly.

Ransome fidgeted with his work. Presently he got up and crossed to the tape. As he saw the purport of its news an oath broke from him.

"Another defeat!" he said bitterly. 'Regret to report serious reverse.' Confound the men, can't they ever win a battle?"

Just then the telephone at the senior sub's elbow began ringing. With an irritable "Now what is it?" Ransome took up the handle and listened.

"Who are you? . . . Oh. . . . Yes, just got it over the tape. . . . Yes, true enough. War Office message. . . . Yes, yes. . . . You're quite right. Good-night, good-night." He put the handle back and the caller rang off.

Looking up absently at the clock Ransome saw that it was close on midnight.

"Good Heavens!" he cried. "Smithers, look at the time, and we've only got three slips of Chamberlain from Liverpool!"

Smithers lifted his brows, not at the irreverence of the speech, but the tone of it. Ransome was usually the most self-contained of men.

"We shall be late to-night," he said quietly.

"Late! *Late!* Why, what do you mean, man? Is it possible you don't grasp the awfulness of the whole situation? Can it be humanly possible for us to catch the mails? I ask you—" here he broke off short, with a little laugh. "I'm a bit 'off,' to-night," he said shamefacedly. "Smithers, I sometimes feel as if—things—were—a little—too much for me. Poor old Harris! He's well out of it. He always had the luck."

Buzz! went the telephone.

Ransome took the receiver and dashed it down upon the table. It lay there, gurgling plaintively.

"Look here, old man," he said, "I'm going round to the News Club for half an hour. See that Chamberlain is put in hand—ring up the agency and bustle them. If the boss wants me, tell him—tell him—oh, tell him what the devil you like."

Ransome reached down his hat and went out of the hot, brightly-lighted room, slamming the door. Smithers whistled softly to himself.

"Our friend John is in a bad way," he said. Then he drove on through his work.

When Ransome returned an hour later he was flushed and boisterous, but apologetic.

"Old man," he said, laying a hand on the shoulder of his chum, "sorry." Smithers grunted, to hide his pleasure.

Ransome set to work vigorously, and with a rush they got to press up to time, for which mercy one of them was devoutly thankful. But from that day onward the senior sub. became a "crank." He indulged privately in various theories for finishing off the war, and gave prominence in the paper to all the wild proposals of the "war experts." When the yeomanry scheme was made known Ransome was one of the first to offer; but he was rejected both as an Imperial Yeoman and as a C.I.V. (or "the Hundred and Fourth," as they were facetiously nicknamed). When his friends chaffed him on the subject—and no topic is sacred to a journalist—Ransome scowled and answered savagely. Still, he was generally cheerful and in the best of health, and Smithers forgot entirely the outburst of a fortnight before.

One March night the two "subs." were again alone. Ransome sat with the new army estimates before him, which required to be mastered and explained in a style to suit the brains of the morrow's readers. Smithers was re-writing the introductory part of a report descriptive of that day's departures for the front, in order to give a semblance of originality to the agency's copy, which would of course appear in all the other papers also. Smithers read, wrote, and sipped his coffee, but his senior sat with hand to brow, motionless and absorbed. Suddenly he looked up, with a drawn face.

"My God!" he said. "There's a man behind that door!"

Silence reigned for a minute. Smithers felt his heart stop dead, and the hand that held his pen trembled. Then he laughed shakily.

"A boy, you mean," he said; "one of the imps at his larks."

"I tell you," said Ransome deliberately, "that there's a *man* behind that door, and, what's more, I know what he is. He's a cursed Boer spy."

Smithers did not answer. Ransome sprang from his seat and dashed through the door. He returned panting.

"He's gone," he said; "but he was there. I—I can't explain, but—I *know* it."

Smithers sat without power of speech. He had gone white, and his legs felt as water. Ransome turned the key in the door very gently, and the noise and the knowledge of it shook the other man like an ague.

He looked up and encountered the eyes of his friend. They were wide open and glaring, and the face they lit up was wrinkled with malice and a laughter that had no mirth behind it. There was another pause.

"I know you now," said Ransome slowly, and still smiling. "You're a damned spy as well. That's what it all means."

"Don't be a fool, Ransome," said Smithers sharply. "For God's sake sit down and get on with your work. We shall never get to press to-night."

"A Boer," repeated Ransome. "It's your fault I didn't catch the *Neapolitan* to-day and go out with the troops."

"Rot!" said Smithers, trying to laugh.

K-r-r-r-r! The tape-machine broke into life, and with the sound Ransome sprang on his friend, flung him struggling against the wall, and pinned him there.

As they wrestled and swayed, these two panting wild-eyed beasts that a few moments before were men, Smithers saw, like the traveller warned of the precipice by the lightning flash in the night, the whole situation and its danger. There was no one within earshot, and it might be a quarter of an hour, at this period of the night, before any one attempted to enter that locked door. He was fighting for life with a madman, taller and stronger than himself, and a man whom he now knew that he loved deeply. And, above all, there was the paper. If it should not come out! Smithers felt that, whatever happened, that terrible possibility must be averted. It was his pride, his soul, his other self, and at the thought of its peril he found himself tripping Ransome with a clip behind the knee, and the men went down together heavily.

Ransome lay still and did not struggle. In the fall his head had struck against the corner of a book-case. Smithers waited cautiously for a minute, and then staggered to his feet, and, leaning against the table, breathed heavily.

"My God! My God!" he whispered to himself with quiver-

ing lips, as he looked down at his friend and comrade. He stood still for some minutes struggling to collect his thoughts, then he woke to the situation suddenly, and stepped to the door. As he turned the key in the lock a faint voice, that seemed to come from a distance, called him by name.

"Tom! . . . Tom! . . ."

Smithers ran to the fallen man. Ransome's eyes were open once more, and now a sane look shone in them—a look full of knowledge and pain.

"What have I done, Tom? God help me, I didn't mean it. . . . I was—out of my mind, I think. Oh, this is terrible. . . . It has been coming on for weeks, old man. You're bleeding from your forehead, Tom. What a brute I am! What have I done. . . . But I can't help it, old man: I can't, indeed! What are you going to do?"

"Fetch a doctor, old chap."

"No, no . . . no, no. . . . D-don't let any one know. . . . For the wife's sake, for the sake of auld lang syne, don't give me away, Tom! . . . I'm . . . better now . . . at least, I hope so. Hide me—put me somewhere—but don't let the others see—and know. Ah! Tom, forgive me, I've hurt you. . . . I've upset you, Tom . . . dear old fellow. . . . I wouldn't have done this for worlds, if . . ." he sobbed as he lay, weak and unable to move—sobbed without tears and without control.

"What can I do—what can I say?" asked Smithers in agony. "You can't lie there—and there's the paper. I must get on with the work."

"Put me in the little room," said Ransome clearly. "And for God's sake, Tom, tie my hands and ankles, and fasten me up . . . don't let this happen again."

Smithers raised his chum by the shoulders, and the injured man scrambled to his feet. Then he reeled and stumbled, supported by his friend, to the little room which led out of the sub-editor's den.

"Tie me up," moaned Ransome, "and forgive me, Tom. . . . I . . . we've have always been . . . chums . . . haven't we? Get on with your work—I'm all right."

There was a knock at the outer door. Smithers locked up Ransome's hiding-place hurriedly, covered a dark stain on the floor, and opened to the summons. A few awkward lies obtained quiet once more for a time. Ransome had been taken ill and had gone home, he said.

The overseer was clamouring for copy. Smithers gathered some half-digested messages together and prepared them. Then he sat down, his head in his hands, and strove to master the doubled task before him. His wits were scattered and his thoughts went whirling. Resting his head upon his hand he found it wet with blood. He staunched the cut hastily with his handkerchief, and little by little sorted order out of the chaos of copy.

A blessed silence succeeded. There was some slight movement in the room behind, but the solitary worker dared not let his wits wander. Suddenly, and without any warning, the outer door creaked stealthily open, and Smithers, looking up, felt a spasm seize on his heart.

There, in the doorway, stood Ransome. His eyes were bright, and he leaned in, looking at Smithers with an unpleasant smile.

"Go on working; don't mind me," he said, coming forward and sitting on the edge of the desk-table. ("He's got out of the farther door of that little room; I had forgotten it, clean," thought Smithers with a shiver.) "I am just off to the War Office; they are to meet me at midnight to hear about my plan. You can have my berth, Smithers, my boy, and welcome. I shan't need it after to-day!"

Ransome laughed, and the sound of his voice shook the other from head to foot.

"I've done with the whole wretched job," he went on; "no more flimsy, no more Reuter, no more liner's scribble. Hooray!" And pouncing upon the pile of littered copy on his desk he tore it to shreds.

Smithers darted to the door, but Ransome was too quick for him. He reached it first, and turning the key in the lock he slipped it into his pocket.

"No telling tales!" he said meaningly. At that moment

the column-printer whirled and commenced to click. Ransome threw himself upon it, and smashing the glass with his fist pounded the thing with his bleeding knuckles until it was silent. Then he sat down in Smithers' place, and laughed as he looked at the copy before him.

"This is filthy stuff," he said, "filthy. It needs cleaning," and he snatched an ink-pot from its recess and poured the black fluid over the pile of papers.

"Stop that!" cried Smithers, goaded beyond prudence or control.

"Stop what?" asked Ransome, looking at him intently and speaking in a strange, low voice.

"I—I must get some copy out of the way, even if *you* needn't," stammered Smithers, and sitting down he made pretence of copying from a printed form. In reality he was writing a frantic appeal to the overseer. "There, they can get on with that," he said, and folding up a bundle of telegrams he thrust the lot into a copy-lift and rang the bell. Ransome stared at him broodingly, and then sprang at the box to stop it, but it was beyond his reach and in a moment had disappeared.

"Curse you, you have betrayed me!" cried Ransome, and he rushed round the table. Smithers ran round also, and the pair stood facing each other, panting. Then the madman sprang upon the table, crossed it, and falling upon his friend bore him to the ground. There he sat, striking the other's face without pause or pity, until half a dozen compositors, rushing in through the little inner room, tore Ransome from his victim, and carried him away struggling, shouting, and striking fiercely about him.

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Smithers, coming slowly to his senses, found himself surrounded by a crowd of faces amongst which he soon recognised the "boss," the overseer, and two of the reporters. He got up feeling dazed, and touching his face clumsily he found his eyes, nose, and lips swollen. He gave a little laugh.

"Better now," asked the boss kindly. "Jaggers, a cab for Mr. Smithers."

"No, no," said the "sub." violently, "I'm going to see the paper out. What time is it?"

It is safe to say that as long as the *Daily Mercury* continues to appear, that night will be talked of and remembered in every department of the paper, from the messengers' ante-room to the editorial den. The whole staff was placed unreservedly under the command of Smithers, who sat in a chair sipping whiskey, giving out work, issuing orders, passing proofs, and despatching messengers in cabs—forgetting nothing, sparing nobody, and losing not a precious minute. When the last page-proof was passed he collapsed, and the assistant-editor took him home in a hansom.

"Where's Ransome?" he said, as they led him into the house, "ill, isn't he?"

Ransome is in a private asylum now, but he is reported as much better. He no longer thinks himself divinely appointed to rid the world of the Boer, and if he is lucky, he will recover so far as to become a "liner" and a loafer in Fleet Street pubs. Smithers received a testimonial, and is now senior sub. on the *Mercury*. It is noticed by his new colleagues that he will never be left alone in the room, and they say at the News Club that he drinks a little. Still, there is one person who will always stand up for Smithers—a little woman named Ransome, who gets half of all that the senior sub. can earn.

HARRY A. SPURR.

A BRAHMAN'S HONOUR

I

We be the Gods of the East,
Older than all;
Masters of mourning and feast,
How should we fall?

A BREATHLESS, shadeless day, a day of monotonous brilliance, was slowly nearing its close. The sun, a rayless ball of flame, hung low over a dun-coloured, rock-studded horizon, whose uncompromising sternness of outline, broken at intervals by ragged clumps of stunted date-palms, was carven, crisp, and clear, along the lower edges of a turquoise sky.

Neither shredded cloudlet nor misty haze of evening lent their softening influences to the scene. No play of light and shade relieved the limitless stretches of yellow-grey sand, jagged with sharp volcanic rocks, and studded with the low dusty scrub that abounds in the desert country of Rajputana. Nature, in these desolate regions, is definite, plain-spoken, chary of useless adornment, yet not wholly without charm. North, and south, and east, and west, as far as eye could see, the gaunt, profitless desert rose and fell in long billowing waves, and the level sun-rays streamed unhindered over its tawny surface. A few moments more, and these vanished abruptly, leaving a crimson-purple stain upon the blue. Again a few moments, and that same blue was aglimmer with pale, palpitating stars.

With a soft strong rush of wings, the grey crane and the wild duck flocked toward their reedy resting places. The night-jar and the fox-headed bat shook off the drowsiness of daylight, and darted through the shimmering twilight in search of food, whilst here and there a trailing cloud of dust showed where some local herdsman drove his flocks and cattle byrewards for the night.

Then, one after one, like dropped stars, a group of homelights revealed the whereabouts of a village, hitherto almost indistinguishable from its surroundings, which it matched in shade so closely as to suggest the protective colouring common to all lesser inhabitants of the desert. A mere cluster of mud-walled, sun-baked huts it was, huddled one upon another as if from an actual sense of the vast loneliness around; but within its narrow bounds men and women loved, and toiled, and suffered, even as in the mightier cities of earth; for here, as there, throve and flourished those elemental passions which lie at the root of human nature and make the wide world one.

This lonely village—the single hint of man's presence to be seen within the vast circling wheel of the horizon—crowned a bare uplifted billow of sand, and toward its fitfully gleaming lights trailing dust-clouds converged from every point of the compass—for pasture is scarce in this unfruitful land, and men must fare far in search of moist green food for their lean cattle. At the billow's base, some six hundred yards from the outermost hut of the village, seven bedraggled date-palms and a few poor tufts of scrub clustered about a well; and beside the well there stood a diminutive Hindu shrine rough-hewn from a boulder of red laterite.

Here, under the dusty, drooping palm-fronds, as the light of stars waxed clearer, might be dimly discerned the outlines of a human figure—the figure of a man, tall, spare, muscular, and as motionless as the slumbering desert itself.

For two full hours he had sat thus, wrapt in such profound meditation as can only be attained to by a mind and soul unharassed by the restless energy of modern civilisation. Desert-born and desert-bred, the silence and lifelessness of his surroundings oppressed him not one whit. Indeed, it is doubtful whether he was so much as consciously aware of any single feature of the outside world, so absorbed was he in the strange secret communings of his own soul with the great unknown Soul of Things, to one of whose countless manifestations the grotesque red shrine by the well was dedicated. For Ram Singh was a Brahman and Rajpoot of caste and lineage unimpeachable, and—his evening Sandhya, or service, being ended—he

had sought out the abode of the tutelary village deity, in order to devote the first hours of evening to worship, meditation, and prayer; to compel, it might be, a waking vision of that unseen world which, to the thoughtful Brahman, is infinitely more real than the trivial, tangible world within whose narrow limits he is constrained to dwell.

The man's face was of the kind that catches and arrests attention, remarkable chiefly for its abrupt definiteness of outline; for lips well cut and set firmly together, and for a keen alertness of glance, which suggested fighting blood in his veins. But the face, taken as a whole, was that of a thinker rather than a warrior—a thinker possessed of unshaken faith in the gods of his forefathers, and of a true Hindu's veneration for the traditions and customs handed down by them, from generation to generation, even unto his own.

A loud and cheerful voice, issuing from an approaching dust-cloud, snapped the thread of the Brahman's solitary musings; and hard upon the shout followed the plump, sand-sprinkled form of the herdsman whose cattle were the creators of the curling cloud.

"Oh-ho, Rama-ji, thou abidest late by the holy well. Hast any special favour to ask of Mai Lakshmi that thou flatterest her with such long devotions?"

"Not so, Durga Das," replied the Brahman with all gravity. "But I am beset by many thoughts. Hast not heard how that Munda Ram, banker, having failed by other means to procure his rightful moneys from Narain Das, thy kinsman, hath sworn to obtain them by *dharna*? And I—I am the herald who set my dagger to his bond."

The wreathed smiles vanished instantly from the listener's face, and he pursed up his thick lips with an air of tragic solemnity that sat strangely upon his comely countenance.

"Hai—hai! Thou hast need then indeed, brother, for thought and prayer. Who knows but that thy life may be the payment of that same bond; then will there be much trouble with the police-log, whose eyes search out every hole and corner. For myself, I hold by the laws of the British raj; and, if I mistake not, Narain Das is also of my way of thinking."

"Ay, that is he, the cowardly son of a jackal!" spoke the Brahman, a faint flicker of mirth lightening his deep eyes. "And it will be seen ere long whether his faith in these new-fangled powers shall avail him aught in his dealings with me and mine. The money he oweth must be paid, and that speedily, or my death will be upon his head. There are but these two ways to end the matter; and he will be loth to choose the last, for all his faith in the white men and their laws."

Durga Das shrugged his shoulders, and turned the palms of his hands outwards in expressive native fashion.

"Who knows? It will appear. His very cowries are dear to him as his own heart's blood; but yet, a Brahman's death"—he shook his bullet head slowly—"nay, I would not be in *his* dhoti this day for all his hoarded treasure. Remainest thou here, or wilt to the village with me? Of a truth, thine house will be sore grieved to hear thy tidings. Wilt along?"

"Nay friend, not yet. Wherefore should my feet make haste to bear ill news?"

The question needed no answer; and, with a sympathetic grunt by way of farewell, Durga Das went on his way, attended, as of custom, by trailing clouds of desert dust.

Ram Singh, left alone again with the darkening desert, and the silence, and the stars, set his mind face to face, unflinchingly, with the situation forced upon him by caste, custom, tradition—the all-powerful trinity of the East. This *dharna* whereof he had spoken to Durga Das was an ancient Hindu method, the most singular and extravagant ever conceived by man, of enforcing the payment of a debt. The practice has, for seventy years and more, been punishable under the British penal code; but since it takes time to convince the desert-bred Hindu that the penal code is a living power, a power that snaps irreverent fingers at all customs and traditions other than its own, *dharna* survived and flourished long after it was nominally supposed to have become extinct.

The fashion of it was on this wise. The injured suitor having vainly demanded the payment of his rightful moneys, proceeded to take up his abode upon the offender's doorstep. Here he

squatted day and night—silent, patient, and inexorable as the grim gods he served—abstaining the while from all food and from all religious ordinances. His victim, if still obdurate, was compelled to follow his example in both respects; and if the mutual fast were prolonged until the suitor succumbed to slow starvation, the debtor was held responsible for his death. Moreover, since this strange tragedy was intensified and rendered far more effectual if the applicant were a Brahman of birth and blood, there grew up among them a special caste of heralds—known as *charan*—who made themselves responsible for the due fulfilment of public engagements, bonds, or important family contracts. The sign manual of their office was a dagger, which, in event of failing to obtain the money, they were bound to plunge into their own hearts. Nor did this decree alone suffice to satisfy the Hindu's innate love of the horrible and the grim; for, should a herald have reason to fear that, despite the lasting odium attaching to a defaulter whose obstinacy had been the immediate cause of a Brahman's death, his own suicide would not suffice to over-awe the wrong-doer, he was constrained to add thereto the life of any member of his family—wife, mother, or child.

To be a herald then, was to live under a suspended sword, in intimate fellowship with the idea of a sudden and violent end; and thus had Ram Singh, and a long, long line of ancestors before him, lived from their youth up. Nevertheless, when the critical moment flashed at last upon the peaceful monotony of his life, it found him resolute indeed, but not unmoved. A vision of his young wife, and of two lusty brown babes, men-children both, made his strong heart contract with fear of that which might shortly be in store for him and them.

And as he sat thus, his mind hovering between prayer and dread foreboding, the moonless night fell round him on all sides, like a thick curtain hiding him from view.

II

What have women to do with thinking? They love and they suffer.

"HAI, hai. My lord tarrieth late; and of a surety these goodly chupattis will shortly be quite unfit for his eating."

Thus did the young Brahman's wife, crouching low before a primitive brick oven, lament her husband's unpunctuality. A small, slim being, entwined about with pale-coloured draperies, and laden with bangles and anklets of silver and glass, she looked scarce capable of "mothering" the two rollicking yearlings who fought, and scrambled, and shouted with sheer excess of life, a few paces from her side. "And if he tarry, he hath surely a good reason for so doing," spoke a voice from a shadowed corner of the dimly lighted room. "Of what use, moreover, are those weakling hands of thine, if they cannot achieve so small a thing as the making anew of a meal for him who is thine husband?"

The voice was the voice of Mai Chandebi, mother of the absentee. It was low, and full, and strong, and sorted well with the tall, deep-chested figure which now arose and emerged into the narrow area of flickering light given out by three cotton wicks afloat in earthenware saucers half filled with oil. "Lo, he cometh even now," she spoke again. "Make ready with haste, Golabi. He will surely be an hungered."

Golabi, nothing loth, obeyed. Obedience was the first and last law of her young life; and being but a simple Eastern woman, untroubled by yearnings after higher aims, she fulfilled it with a gladsome heart.

Upon the entrance of her lord, all things were laid in readiness for his partaking, and the women, as was meet, withdrew into a darkened corner the while. Golabi, a bare brown son on either hip, flashed a smile of conscious triumph at the man, their father, as she went; but his eyes were fixed on the tall form of his mother, and it was to her he spoke for a moment, in carefully lowered tones.

"I would have speech with thee mother, afterwards, alone, on a matter of importance."

Golabi's quick ears caught the words; and if a pin-prick of jealousy stabbed her heart, she had pride enough and wisdom enough to receive the hurt in silence: only her arms tightened instinctively around her twofold treasure, for in them, she well knew, lay all her power.

Whilst the mother and wife sat together in the darkness, and whispered their women's talk concerning life's insistent trivialities, Ram Singh, in the lonely silence imposed upon him during the solemn rite whereon he was engaged, squatted upon the bare, baked earth, clad in nothing more substantial than a loin-cloth and the mystic Brahminical cord. And even as he ate, and eating blessed his wife's domestic skill, the cold, inexorable steel was at his heart, and in his mind a foretaste of the bitterness of death.

When the meal was ended his mother came forward, whilst Golabi, with one yearning backward glance, betook herself to an inner room, and rained hot tears of jealousy upon the heads of her babbling babes.

At his mother's approach Ram Singh arose, and the two faced one another squarely—spirits of equal strength. Erect and silent, their eyes met upon the self-same plane, eyes steady, searching, and alight with the fire of a great love.

The woman spoke first.

"And hath it come so soon, my son? Yea; but I might have known. Never falleth the sword upon the neck of the willing victim."

"Thou knowest, then?"

"Ay; how should I *not* know?"

"And by what means, oh mother?"

"Canst thou ask that? I have seen the sword's shadow in other eyes than thine, my son."

Then silence fell between them, for their lips were not skilled in the use of soft words. Again it was the woman who spoke first.

"To whom goest thou for the money?"

"To Narain Das, landholder."

A momentary shadow clouded her clear eyes.

"It will go hard with thee, Rama-ji," she said.

"Ay; but it shall go hard with him also." And the Brahman set his square white teeth in fierce determination. "I hate him and all his mongrel breed; and we shall see now whether his faith in the white man's laws shall avail him aught when a Brahman's honour is at stake."

"Thou hast not yet seen him?"

"Yea, that have I. I am come even now from his very door."

A swift tightening of the strong lips told how the mother's heart ached with dread anxiety for the fate of her goodly son.

"And of what like was his countenance?" Her tone was steady, but all the life had gone out of it.

"Even as I had known it would be. He laughed me to scorn, and bade me carry word to Munda Ram that he had best make application for his dues through the law courts of the English."

"Hai—hai. And thou?"

The words were a mere whisper.

"I answered him as befitted one of my calling, that the white man's law was naught to me, but the honour of my caste was all, and that on the morrow, as soon as might be after dawning, I should return and take up my post at his door-sill. I said, moreover, that if my blood upon his head did not avail to shake his scorn, I would add thereto the blood of her—even of Golabi—my wife."

A swift convulsion of pain contorted the man's face, and he turned it aside from the scrutiny of Chandebi's searching eyes. It is not an easy or a pleasant thing for a man to be called upon to kill his own wife deliberately, and in the open light of day; but the Great Ones take no count of such trifling inconveniences.

A long moment of silence followed. Neither was capable of instant speech. The grim inevitable lay like lead upon their hearts.

At length, with head uplifted, and with fixity of purpose writ in every line of her powerful face, the old woman stepped forward and laid her hand upon the Brahman's arm.

"My son, thinkest thou that this of which thou hast spoken

shall come to pass so long as breath is in my nostrils and blood is in my veins? Is it for naught that I am thy mother, and the widow of thy father? . . . If there be any talk of death in this matter, it shall be *mine only*; . . . hearest thou, my son?"

The fire of youth—dominant, masterful youth—flashed from her keen eyes. The man was amazed at the transformation wrought in her face. But his strength of will matched hers. Was it not of her own bestowing?

"Nay, mother," he made answer, from betwixt set teeth, "this thing shall not be. It is shameful talk. Thy life——"

"Is it more to thee than hers, Rama-ji?"

There was smothered eagerness in the question; for even so dire an extremity could not quench all the woman in her.

The agonised man caught her wrinkled hands in both his own.

"Oh mother, I entreat thee, speak not of this thing," he cried. "Is not thy life sacred to me above all other lives? Think only what thou askest of me. It cannot—nay, it *shall* not be!"

Her momentary excitement had subsided. She was erect again, with eyes and mouth unflinching.

"And I say that it shall be, my son. Since when hast thou learnt to set thy will against mine? Let there be no further speech on the matter. To-morrow I go with thee to the house of this man. She is young, Rama-ji. She hath borne thee men-children, and shall bear thee more in the years to come. But I—I am old, and a widow, and my life is a little thing—a very little thing to give for thine honour, son of my heart."

For all answer, the man could only clench his hands and groan; and going over to him, she comforted him as tenderly as though he had been a suffering child; but no further speech of the morrow's hideous necessity passed between them.

Alone in the darkened inner chamber Golabi, stretched beside her sleeping sons, wept, silently and unceasingly, bitter, angry tears; and thus her husband found her when, at a late hour, he came in to her. Very gently he asked her of their cause; but she could only answer him brokenly with another question.

"Hast thou nought to tell me also, oh my husband? In what manner have I sinned against my lord that he should show his trouble to others and hide it from me, . . . his wife? I am no weakling . . . I that bare thee two sons in one day. Wherefore then hast thou locked up thine heart against me?"

The man laid a strong, cool hand upon her dark head, stilling its restless motion.

"Hush thee, light of my life; speak not so. Truly it is for very love of thee that I have kept silence. On the morrow thou shalt know all things; but the night is for rest, and an anxious heart is a sorry bed-fellow. I would have thee sleep, my pearl. Dost hear? Thy lord commands thee, sleep."

When an Eastern woman loves, her love engenders a very passion of submission; and, thus commanded, Golabi could not choose but obey, and that gladly.

III

"Still Brahm dreams, . . . and till he wakes the gods die not."

THE first swift, radiant flash of dawn found the doomed household astir and busied with such practical preparations as must needs go forward whether hearts be at breaking point or no.

The two women worked in silence, each at her appointed task—Golabi with moist lashes, despite her heroic maternal achievement, and Chandebi with hard-set lips and dry, bright eyes. The two plump babes, with the magnificent egotism of childhood, fought and rollicked as of custom, and laughed up into the faces of the silent women, whose fingers were busied mechanically over the making of rice-balls, flower-balls, and sweetmeats, to be offered, during the inevitable *sraddhá** ceremonies, for the due nourishment of Chandebi's ghost, when it should have discarded its mortal body, and for the formation of a new body as its vehicle in the regions of the blest. A grim occu-

* A ceremony of propitiatory prayers and offerings to the spirits of departed ancestors, performed yearly, and also before any solemn undertaking.

pation, truly ; but to your zealous Hindu custom renders all things possible, and most things endurable.

The ceremony, like others of its kind, was long, and dreary, and solemn to the verge of stupefaction, involving much sprinkling of water, and droning of prayers, and propitiating of priests. Ram Singh, as eldest male member of the family, himself performed the principal rites, clad, as of custom, in a spotless loin-cloth and the white Brahminical thread, whilst his younger brethren were permitted to sprinkle the flower-balls with water, and to offer sweetmeats to the ever-present, ever-hungry priests. Custom decreed, moreover, that the ceremony should be carried through fasting, and to the mournful accompaniment of wailing chants, and it was so ; whilst the ghost that soon should be, awaited its close with a stoicism bred of lifelong resignation to the decrees of caste and of the gods.

The sun rose high in the blinding blue of the heavens when three tall figures, clad one and all in dazzling white, drew up before the threshold of Narain Das, defaulter.

The worthy landholder, being a man of much flesh, and of a cheerful, time-serving humour—inexorable only where his cherished horde of silver was concerned—came forth to greet his guests with a shining morning face wreathed in benevolent smiles. He wore the short jacket and *dhoti* of his class, and in a gap between the two garments a roll of brown flesh showed, like a dark girdle round his ample form.

"Ohé, Rama-ji, thou art a welcome guest at all times," he began, in accents a trifle too suave for sincerity. But at sight of Chandebi's draped figure, and of the gleam of the bared blade in her son's right hand, his flow of words forsook him, and a furtive expression of uneasiness crept into his restless eyes.

Despite his cringing reverence for the "Sahib" and all his works, and a consuming fear of breaking one jot or tittle of the Great Queen's commands, Narain Das was none the less a Hindu of caste, which, being interpreted, signifies that even the Great Queen herself was an inconsiderable personage in his eyes when compared with the man who now stood before him, unflinching purpose writ clear in every line of his stern, spare face.

At no time was this full-bodied landholder overburdened with an excess of valour, nor was its quality proof against the flash of a naked sword in the sunlight. In truth, the prospect of seeing an innocent woman's blood spilt upon the ground in open daylight might well have overawed a braver man than he. Moreover, behind the mere horror of the whole thing lurked the heart-shaking conviction that the blood thus spilt would be upon his own head from now until the day of his death. At the bare thought a clammy dew broke out upon his forehead, and the suavity of his smiles increased tenfold.

"Yea verily, I had forgot; 'tis to settle that little matter of the loan that thou art come, and in a happy hour, my friend. For in truth I was but now minded to send thee word that at the month's end I shall at length be enabled to make good my debt to my honoured creditor, Munda Ram; then will all be well betwixt us, as is meet between brother and brother."

His fat brown hands moved tremblingly one over the other, as he lifted cunning, conciliatory eyes to the Rajput's inflexible face.

For all answer, Ram Singh turned and looked upon his mother and she, without a quiver of hand or lip, kneeled down before him, and bared her grey head to the sun's fierce rays.

"Thine honoured creditor asks but a plain answer to a plain question. Wilt thou make payment at once, or no?"

The Rajput's tone was quiet, business-like, decisive; but an ominous movement of his right arm sent a snake-like shiver curling down the defaulter's sleek, brown back.

"Yea, I will make payment by all means, my friend—by all means," he rejoined with a quavering assumption of cheerfulness; and the kneeling woman lifted her head, and made as though she would rise to her feet. "But, alas, to procure so many rupees at one moment's notice is not within the power of this slave." Whereat Chandebi bowed her head as before, and set her lips hard. "At the in-gathering of the harvest much moneys will accrue to me; and then, by the gods of my fathers, I will repay every *cowrie* I have borrowed from the great and worthy Munda Ram . . . for I am a poor man . . . a *very* poor man, and that thou knowest."

His restless hands were fast clenched now to hide the tremor that shook them; and he dared not look up a second time into the Brahman's face. But a sudden blinding flash that smote him full in the eyes told that the sword had been swung aloft above the motionless grey head.

"Have done with thy goat's bleating, thou son of a jackal, and make answer . . . yea, or nay . . . once and for all."

Ram Singh's voice rang out now, loud and clear; and the eager, gaping crowd that had gathered round to look on at this unwonted form of *tamasha* held its breath as one man, knowing that the end was very near at hand.

With lips visibly trembling, Narain Das spoke: "Stay thine hand, oh Rama-ji, I pray thee; and by all that is holy I will make payment in two hours' time . . . yea, in one hour, if that be possible. Only do thou . . ."

But his quavering assurances were unceremoniously cut short by a discordant cry of horror that rang shudderingly out upon the still air; for the long, curved sword had swept downward with mighty force, and Chandebi's grey head lay in a pool of blood at the landholder's very feet, to the lasting damage of his patent leather shoes.

With a howl of terror the man turned and fled into the house, closely followed by the two brothers, who had yet to enforce upon him the customary mingling of his blood with that of the victim.

The awe-stricken crowd broke up into groups, which—so soon as the first gasp of speechless horror had spent itself—waxed garrulous exceedingly, till the sleepy village buzzed with talk of the morning's tragedy; and, since the ear of the law is swift to hear, and its arm no less swift to smite, in a very few hours a second deputation was drawn up before the house-front of Narain Das.

This deputation consisted of a company of yellow-turbaned native police, backed by an English civilian, pale and perspiring, and demanding, in terms more peremptory than polite, the person of Ram Singh, Brahman and Rajput.

The man gave himself up with the habitual air of dignity that was his. He acknowledged his act, also, without a word

of explanation or defence ; and Golabi and her two lusty sons saw his face no more.

The law being wholly without understanding in regard to so nice a point of family honour, and being, moreover, mainly concerned with the protection of life and limb, condemned Chandebi's high-minded son to transportation for life ; and he accepted its decree, as he had accepted most of life's ugly inevitables, stoically and in silence.

Not so Narain Das. His wailing was loud and long, and sleep forsook his aching eyes. A vision of that grey head, steeped in its own warm blood, was with him ceaselessly night and day ; so that at length, goaded by the two fold agony of terror and remorse, this spurner of Brahm's decrees voluntarily starved himself until he died.

M. DIVER.

ROSA MYSTICA

DREAMS fall as petals from some magic rose
And bring a strange enchantment to my days
Of echoed song from some dim garden close,
Whose flowers have never graced earth's sterile ways.

Heavy with beauty's perfume I would lie
In slumber on this couch of dream impearled,
And dream in dream that time had long passed by :
But, ah, to wake again into the world.

O come, thou dream of dreams before my eyes ;
O life lived far apart from joys and woes,
When every scattered petal shall arise
And form the true and ever-living rose.

CECIL FRENCH.

SPORT AND WRITERS

THE shooting season is upon us once again, and the self-made man, who does not belong to a "county," but comes from anywhere, "the back of beyond" or thereabouts, and never had the advantage in his tender youth of going out with the guns and killing things; and likewise and more particularly that great sheep, the literary man, whose peculiarity is that he is not made, but born (as the Latin poet and Mr. Andrew Lang have it)—these individuals must now perforce turn their untutored minds to books for their lesson in behaviour on the field. There are compensating advantages, says one's egotism, in all things: and a mental reflection of the sort, upon one of the compensating advantages which the literary sheep has over the barbarian in certain matters, especially in this matter of field sports, was provoked a few seasons ago in the unpruned and inflamed imagination of one of the youngest of the lambs of literature, to the following effect.

It was after a day's "covert-shooting," wherein to his gun were scored four kills to thirty-seven misses. He had never covert-shot before, nor shot at all in fact, either covertly or in public; and his friends were quick to offer him that galling consolation. But had he not heard them in the dog-cart, as he meditated upon the infinite abysses of the starry heavens, snigger as they asked each other what the shooting stars usually hit; or propounded conundrums *apropos* of rockets and great guns? (So would they torture words, for want of mother wit!) He was palpably laughed at; and grew, first, savage; but afterwards, as befitting his cloth, black melancholy. Later in the evening, however, he brightened a little; and when the kindly-natured eldest-born of his host put it to him casually: "By the way, you're a reader: read ——'s book on sport?—No? Just the thing for you. I'll fetch it"—he eagerly received the be-lauded work, and took it to his bosom and his room. It was an

old book, not so much read now, perhaps ; but of importance in its day, and still to be found in many country houses. And there began his revenge ; for he turned at once to the article on "Covert-shooting."

The pages were brushed through between thumb and finger—about fifty of them. The thumb arrested one with a quotation on it :

"So he had nothing known."

What's this ! "They in their ignorance were happy, as Othello says he would have been, however vile the inconstancy of Desdemona,

"So he had nothing known."

What *is* this ? Is it possible that a writer on a serious and intricate technical subject of this sort must drag in a poet to help him out ! "Charlatan !" was the involuntary exclamation. But let's see ! What is it all about ? Why, just this much : "A friend of mine turned down a number of Leadenhall Market cock pheasants in his poor preserve in order to show his friends sport and"—"they in their ignorance were happy," &c.

There, gentle reader, you have a specimen, though not quite a gem of the first water, of the sporting writer's way of dealing with forest-shooting—together with a specimen of the sort of quaint literary quotation in which, it seems, he delights. Quotation ! the most difficult and delicate of all the literary arts ; the thing which genius alone can bring off successfully ; the thing that is voted bad taste in public, and insulting to one's friends in private correspondence—you open your book on sport—and it blinds you :

"Happy the man whose only care
A few paternal acres bound,
Content to shoot his native hare
On his own ground."

Covert-shooting, indeed ! You might cry for it through your fifty pages before you looked like coming to it, and not get it in the end, though blinding wit of this kind you met on every page. Back and forward then he plied the pages, muttering : "Facts, man, facts ! we die for lack of facts, and

you offer us poetry"; and the nearest he gets, to a fact is: "To return to my theme"—(his *theme*!)—and then a quotation! And again: "Once more to my theme"—till "Space will not admit of my dealing with," &c., and so—it ends! And you, poor fool, who have read everything, are sick of books and bookish people, sick to death of poetry—you who want to become a barbarian for a few days, to learn to covert-shoot correctly—all that these great men can offer you is this! Is it irony? No; it is in perfect seriousness. You close the book with a snap, pitch it on the floor, and reflect. Hazily in your memory arise the *ipsissima verba* of a great thinker you once had known: If you want practical advice, go to the unpractical man—the thinker: given the A B C of it, he will help you out.

It was all quite plain at once: it stood to reason: action and thought are no yokefellows: men of affairs, men of action, that go up and down in the earth with their brains in their "ten" fingers, learning how to do everything, from riding a bicycle backward, or taking a thirty-pound fish for his last breather through a February snow-storm, to drilling a raw battalion or ruling India: and such necessary or nugatory matters—we must not expect of them what we expect of each other. But, contrariwise, if they expect of us what they expect of each other—we must be allowed to laugh in our turn. We must be allowed all (and more, but at least all) of the compensation referred to by that elegant if saturnine writer of books, Matthew Arnold, that when the man of affairs takes to letters, the man of letters shall be allowed incontinently to take to laughter. And more.

For has not the literary man from his birth sneaked about here and there in the world, with weak hams, a paralysed liver and a febrile tongue, asking an alms of forbearance, uttering his quit-rent of inanities, brushed aside, thrust down, made a door-mat for brazen insolence, till, having fought the battle of life with the restaurant waiters and been worsted, he, as though he were the lesser man, must crawl away from the company ere dinner is done to find himself a cold dishonourable bed.

For what can the unfortunate one before these daylight sons of action? They fish, they shoot, they put their trust in horses,

they go to hounds and dogs; they go down into and come up from the bowels of the earth which they have mined with their hands, they march upon the surface of it and possess it. Nature, that loves them all, endows them with all she loves: blood and bone, and strong bodies that they shall resist her and give her joy: taking her against her will in the forceful, rapturous embrace not to be denied: glib tongues she gives them in the press of men, and when these wag what they say has snap and go, recalling familiarly its birthplace in her forests, on her mountains and her seas. . . . But let one of these brave fellows but once have set foot upon the shaking quag of art and letters to utter himself therein—down he goes: mud and unquenchable laughter in the firmament, beholding it amazed, is his just portion; and not a mother's-lamb of literature but, transformed to a bloodhound, may wade in, safely, a baying, frothy chaps and gleaming eye teeth, through the inky morass to the place where the felon's body is last at view and sate himself therein—if he have a mind to it.

And there is just now such a vast eruption of manly out-of-doors literature!—and we are all so full of the praises of country life and flatter ourselves that we are such wholesome people. But what shall we say of the majority of these books? With literature they have really nothing to do: they are either strictly technical, accurate, scientific, useful; or they are just—drivel. Education (*pace* Mr. Lang) has perhaps improved the style of its writers, compared with those of the seventies; but it is all the same, just such merely crazy, laugh-provoking stuff.

Meantime the thinker and the poet must wait their turn, one supposes. And meantime, just as Shakespeare and Balzac and the great writers of tragedy, for their own wise purpose, surrounded their sanguinary heroes with all that is gentle and beautiful in nature, so, who shall gainsay these barbarians turned writers if they must disport themselves in this dead period of letters, similarly summoning such gentlemanly assistance from polite literature and the humanities as a woolly reminiscence of a public school training may afford!

SINGLE TRIGGER.

“ONE WITH NATURE ”

ONE with her :
Yes ; when the hare
Goes by at a dash

With a leg to spare—
And drops to the flash ;
Or a teal, down the wind,
Swift and strong,
Cracks his wings
As he sings
His death-song.

One with her :
Yes ; when I plunge
Down, deep down in the tarn ;
Beat my way up
Through the cold,
While I hold
Bound in my bosom my breath.

One with her :
Yes ; when I lunge
At the throat of the wolf
For my life with her.
Ever at strife with her ;
Thus I am one with her
Till I am done with her.

